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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

GETTING THE STORY OUT:
FOUR ADULTS LEARNING TO WRITE

BY

MARGARET WHITE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT, CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1990

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ISBN 0-315-60121-3

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the changing thoughts and feelings about writing of four adults in a literacy program which uses an expressive writing approach. A major recommendation of literacy scholars in the current search for solutions to the illiteracy problem is that writing should play at least an equal role with reading in literacy courses, because it gives the learners a voice and is therefore empowering. Little research with adults exists so it is difficult to evaluate this recommendation. A purpose of this study was to add to the sparse research regarding adult literacy learners' views of and experiences with writing.

This qualitative study is interpretive in orientation and inductive in approach. Data were generated primarily from the transcripts of two unstructured, taped interviews held with each of the four purposively chosen participants. Additional data came from observational notes and personal documents. Analysis of the data was guided by Taylor and Bogdan (1984) and Tesch (1987), and the emergent themes were verified with the participants.

The themes are reported in three chapters under the categories of Perceptions of Writing, Changing Self-Concepts as Writers, and Learning to Write. Overall concepts of and attitudes to writing were complex. Goals for writing tended to shift from external, functional motivations to internal, personal-expression motivations over the course of the

program. The participants' attitudes to writing and their self-concepts as writers changed from negative to relatively positive as they learned to write. They valued affective components of the learning process at least equally with cognitive elements. Considerable transformation in attitudes and behavior took place as writing skills were acquired and stories were told.

Another purpose of the study is to invite discussion of the recommendation that literacy programs should take into account the multi-faceted nature of writing, the learners' need for a safe and supportive psychosocial environment, and the benefits of a metacognitive approach. These factors appeared to the student participants and to the researcher to contribute to the learning of writing and to the consequent empowerment of these four adult literacy learners.

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine how four adult literacy learners view writing: its importance in their lives, and their perceptions of the process and impact of learning to write. I came to this study as a former secondary school English teacher whose experience as a volunteer tutor of adult literacy learners had led to a deep interest in the field. Although I had enjoyed teaching, particularly teaching writing, I was interested in a more learner-centred approach than was feasible in a public school setting. I had therefore decided to make a career change into adult education. In addition my work with women's groups, using Freierian-based popular education techniques, had developed an interest in empowerment. Giving journal-writing workshops had also shown me the transformational power of writing one's own stories.

Shaped by this background, I began my exploration of literacy with a search for a definition because programs can improve only when it is clear what they intend to do. This search led to my finding ubiquitous references to the "literacy crisis" and to the concept of empowerment. Delving further, I found numerous prescriptions for and descriptions of the language experience approach to writing as the most empowering method of teaching literacy. But I could not find research into adult learners' views of

writing. As a result of my predispositions and my search of the literature, the focus of the study began to take shape.

The Nature and Scope of the Literacy Problem

Adult illiteracy in Canada and the industrialized western world is once again being viewed with great concern. Definitions of literacy are diverse, and so, correspondingly, are estimates of how many adults are not literate. Generally, however, policy makers, employers, researchers, educators, and non-literates agree that there are too many of the latter. Compounding this problem of the number of non-literates is the apparent inadequacy of literacy programs. In recent decades they attract too few adults and many of those who begin programs drop out. Yet adult non-literates report deep unhappiness with being illiterate, so why aren't they attending programs?

Although traditional literacy programs have focused on reading, scholars in the last decade recommend an emphasis on writing. Their interest in writing arises in part out of new views of literacy as a social rather than an educational achievement, a perspective which sees literacy learning as an empowering process. These theorists believe that writing is potentially empowering because it gives the formerly silent non-literate a voice, but there is little research with learners to support this opinion. Do the learners view writing as empowering and if so, in what ways? We need to develop more accessible and successful programs, and a focus

on writing may well be a key ingredient of such programs. First, however, we need to ask the learners what they think.

Conceptual Framework of the Problem

In Canada in the last decade, then, the problem of adult illiteracy has come to the attention of government, business and the general public. Attempts to find solutions occur in theory, research and practice. The theoreticians focus on redefining literacy and as a result many of them recommend emphasizing the writing component of literacy. The researchers have paid attention to discovering what illiteracy and literacy learning mean to adults. The practitioners experiment to find effective teaching/learning approaches and methods.

These components are highly interrelated. The concern with adult illiteracy has led to new theory, research and practice. New definitions of literacy are based on research, and they in turn suggest new areas for study. Literacy practices grow out of both theory and research; they also lead to theory development and are themselves the subject of study (Figure 1, page 20).

Within this conceptual framework I found myself most interested in the theories and practices which contain the notion of empowerment. I have chosen, therefore, to base this study on the current theory which suggests that literacy is a social phenomenon, a potentially empowering achievement especially when writing is stressed, and on

research which recommends that literacy programs arise out of learners' needs and goals. I decided I wanted to find out how literacy students viewed writing.

To guide the study development and the data generation, I settled on three broad questions to ask the participants:

1. How did your inability to write affect your life?
2. What was important for you in the process of learning to write?
3. What impact has learning to write had on your life?

Although these questions guided the data generation phase of the study, I found during data analysis that a shift in emphasis was necessary. This is explained in the introduction to Chapter 5.

I wanted to work with four learners in a literacy program, and I wanted to teach the learners myself. This way I could give them a fair return for their participation in my study, and I could be more closely involved in their learning experience. Because I found the reports of the effectiveness of the language experience approach convincing, I chose to use that method. I supplemented this later with procedures from the process writing approach.

Significance of and Need for the Study

The Numbers and the Costs

UNESCO has declared 1990 to be International Literacy

Year, and although it would be comfortable to assume that adult illiteracy is a problem unique to the third world, of course it is a serious problem in the industrialized west also. In Canada the current widespread concern about adult illiteracy has been gathering momentum since Thomas published her report on adult literacy in Canada for UNESCO in 1983. One-quarter to one-third of the industrialized western world's population is functionally illiterate, she told us (p. 20). For Canadians, the achievement of a grade 8 level of formal schooling defines literacy, and more than 1/4 of our adults have not reached grade 9. Most skilled jobs and many training programs require a grade 10 achievement; thus, regardless of ability, between 4 and 5 million Canadians are automatically excluded from most training and employment opportunities (Thomas, p. 2; Fairbairn, 1987, p. 597).

In 1986 two more reports added fuel to the fire of literacy concern. In February, CBC Television presented a documentary expose of the nature and extent of adult illiteracy in Canada. "Hidden Minority" told us that 4 million Canadians could not perform such everyday tasks as reading a newspaper or filling out an application form, and 1 million Canadians could not read at all (in Pillay, 1986, p. 1). The Fall Royal Bank Reporter of that year included an article by David Suzuki which provided the same statistics, adding that 70% of illiterate Canadians live in

urban areas near learning facilities which few of them enter. Sixty percent suffer chronic unemployment. In spite of this alarming information, the Canadian government was then spending 50 cents for each illiterate adult (in MacRae, 1988, p. 1). An unusual private response from a public figure occurred in the same year when Peter Gzowski, CBC radio personality, initiated his annual golf tournaments to raise awareness and funds for literacy (Gzowski, 1990).

Government and business awareness of the problem has continued to grow. Fairbairn addressed the Canadian Senate in 1987 in order to put literacy on the national agenda, painting a grim picture of the isolation and vulnerability of Canadian non-literates, and of their exclusion from the opportunities most of us take for granted. She makes an eloquent plea for increased public awareness and for core funding for nationwide programs, claiming that the literacy share of federal money for education and retraining was .001%. Also in 1987 Southam Press released its widely publicized study of illiteracy in Canada. Its statistics were not new or startling, but the information reached and dismayed a wider audience. In addition to its confirmation that almost 5 million Canadians are functionally illiterate (and it used different literacy criteria than those employed by Statistics Canada) in that many everyday tasks are beyond their reading and writing ability, the report added the

information that Canadian literacy programs are poorly attended with high dropout rates (Calamai, 1987, p. 9).

The Southam Report disseminated to the general public quotations from literacy learners which illustrated the high personal costs of illiteracy. Shortly afterwards, the 1988 Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy estimated that the annual economic cost of illiteracy to Canada is $10 billion through unemployment, industrial accidents, training expenses and lost productivity (in Rockhill, 1988, p. 5).

Other hidden personal and social costs are enormous (Callwood, 1990). We live in a world of print, from labels on bottles to government forms to advertising materials. Faking it becomes increasingly difficult in even the most low-level jobs. The delivery person can't get far when he doesn't read street signs, the otherwise successful house painter can't mix colours if he can't read the tins, the welfare recipient who can't read numbers is at the mercy of whoever cashes her cheque (and non-literates tend to avoid banks). Few of our 5 million non-literates can participate in the democratic process because, in spite of television, they remain relatively uninformed about the issues and the candidates. Because they seldom vote, election platforms rarely include issues which would appeal to these disenfranchised, such as poverty programs and educational opportunities. And the number of non-literates in our prisons is disproportionately high.

Federal government response in 1988 was to create a National Literacy Secretariat and announce a $110 million five-year plan to combat illiteracy. This pledge would involve spending approximately $5 a year per non-literate adult (Fillion, 1990, p. 44). New provincial and federal initiatives are planned for 1990 to acknowledge International Literacy Year, but the nature and effectiveness of those initiatives remain to be seen. There is hope in the very recent flowering of new and innovative programs.

Program Involvement

We share our literacy problem with the United States, where Kozol (1985) estimates the number of adult illiterates at 60 million, yet literacy programs reach fewer than 3 million people and have a dropout rate of at least 30 percent (p. 42). Hunter and Harman (1979) report that U.S. policy makers agreed in the 1960s that the target population for government-funded upgrading classes was between 54 and 64 million, but only 2 to 4% of those people enrolled in programs.

During the 1960s and 1970s, literacy training in Canada focused on functional literacy for employment preparation (Pillay, 1986, p. 6), often for non-existent jobs. Adult upgrading classes in vocational schools and community colleges still account for a large proportion of literacy education opportunities, but there has been an increase

throughout the 1980s of volunteer tutoring programs, which usually have tutors and learners working together on a one-to-one basis. In the last half of the decade other kinds of community and workplace based programs have begun, including innovative uses of computer technology, in response to requests for more flexible and varied learning environments. Nevertheless only 1 in 10 of our non-literates comes to programs (Calamai, 1987, p. 9).

We have no clear picture of the reasons for poor attendance, in spite of the documented enormous economic and personal costs of illiteracy. No doubt some non-literates are living full and satisfying lives without reading and writing skills, and for many others the commitment of time and/or money is too high. Certainly several motivating factors have to converge before potential learners come to programs (Pillay, 1986, p. 79). But even if we focus our attention on the adequacy of current programs for the 1 in 10 who wish to attend them, the situation is still disturbing.

In her review of research into recruitment and retention in adult basic education, Balmuth (1988) found that "high rates of absenteeism and dropout plague ABE programs everywhere" (p. 621). She recommends a number of measures to decrease absenteeism and attrition, such as community planning, extrinsic motivations, buddy systems, counselling, active follow-up of dropouts, emphasizing the

social side effects of learning, and learners' support groups (p. 622). Interestingly, methodology is not mentioned as an area needing improvement, perhaps because her research revealed that dropouts usually blamed their leaving on outside factors rather than program dissatisfaction (p. 623).

Many different strategies have been used to teach adult literacy but the manner of presentation remains virtually the same, at least in ABE programs. Whatever the strategy--language pattern drills, phonics, whole word or sentence methods, worksheets or language experience materials--the traditional classroom is usually the setting. It has many characteristics which render it ineffective for literacy learners: the student-teacher ratio is often unfavourable; the teacher has limited time and cannot effectively accommodate individual learning styles; time schedules are frequently rigid and so, often, are seating arrangements. In addition, many non-literate adults had earlier negative experiences with typical classoom environments. Confidentiality, a need for many adults, can be difficult to guarantee in a classroom setting, and enforced participation can also be perceived as threatening.

The instructional methods, too, may be inappropriate, based as they commonly are on research with young children or else on educators' predetermined beliefs of what non-literates should know. A number of programs based on

learners' needs and on holistic approaches to reading and writing, or else those using one-to-one tutoring, may be more effective. We cannot, however, be sure yet--partly because these programs are relatively new and partly because evaluations are suspect.

As Diekhoff (1988) suggests, we cannot necessarily trust program evaluations. Although "overestimates of the effectiveness of adult literacy training have not resulted from how the data are collected, but rather from how those data are interpreted and by the very nature of the data" (p. 625), nevertheless many program evaluations are overly optimistic. He concludes that adult literacy programs have not resulted in "life-changing improvements in reading ability" (p. 629). He explains that the misrepresentation comes from estimable motives, such as unwillingness to criticize well-intentioned efforts in such an important cause, but "until there is a greater recognition that what we are doing now is not working, it is unlikely that we will identify and eliminate the barriers to more effective programs" (p. 630).

Need for the Study

A wish to see more effective programs is the underlying general motivation for this study. No coherent body of knowledge yet exists about the problem: theories about literacy as a function of social context are barely a decade old, as are theories about the role of writing in the

teaching of literacy for empowerment. Research which tests theory in these areas is also very recent, and it is very sparse. At the same time, dissatisfaction grows with both the number of non-literates and the effectiveness of programs in tackling the literacy problem.

We have become sensitive to the desirability of basing programs on learners' needs and goals. Although learners' own concepts of what literacy is and what they need may be too limited and misleading (Fagan, 1988a) to be used as a basis for program change, we need to know what they think before we can devise strategies to assist them to learn. We want to take them from where they are to where they want to go and to raise awareness of options they may not have considered. Psychologists, sociologists and reading specialists are currently promoting language experience as a way to do this. We do not, however, have data about, or even criteria for, the effectiveness of this approach, nor of the relative importance of reading and writing. Literacy methodology is rarely discussed in discussions of literacy programs. For example, in the description of 19 programs in the Southam Report, reading and writing methodologies are never examined although factors such as accessibility and delivery systems are (Fagan, 1988b, p. 230).

Delimitations and Limitations

The study findings are delimited to the sample of four literacy learners, reading at a grade 3-4 level, in a

literacy program in Saskatchewan. Their views of writing are bound to the contexts of their own lives and the setting in which they learned to write and are not necessarily generalizable to other adult literacy learners in other settings. Two limitations of the study are researcher effect and the relatively short time of the study; longitudinal studies would be useful to determine the authenticity of perceived and observed changes.

Interpretive Inquiry

In any study, the research problem, the paradigm, the methods, and the context need to be congruent if the findings are to have any meaning (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 239). I had determined a problem which interested me, explored the literature relating to the problem, specified some questions I wanted to find answers to, and next had to select the appropriate paradigm to work from. The first issue to decide, as Hammond (1989, p. 113) stresses, is which theoretical approach will be used: positivist, alternate or eclectic. In other words, will relevant data be quantitative, qualitative, or both? To make this decision I had first to examine my chosen problem and my own views of the nature of reality, then determine which paradigm would provide the best fit.

What I wanted to know was how adult literacy learners viewed writing. This concern with meaning, with exploring learners' perceptions, led to the choice of an interpretive

approach. It seems to be generally accepted now that the interpretive paradigm is appropriate for understanding human behavior, when we want to ask, "What is this or that kind of experience like?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p.237). This is particularly true if one is interested in subjective experience, verstehen or hermeneutical understanding, and if one's world view is relativistic and includes a belief in multiple realities, in the vital role of context in defining "truth", and that inquiry is value-laden, not value-free. These were beliefs that I brought to the study.

Personal experience also influenced my choice of this paradigm. Immediately prior to becoming a graduate student I had participated, as a respondent, in a hermeneutical doctoral study. The focus on personal meaning and the gratifying, even therapeutic, effects of being so seriously listened to had aroused my interest in qualitative research. When I discovered that the term literacy has many meanings, it was a natural step to expect that my non-literate participants would have contextualized concepts of literacy and its meaning to them. In addition to my curiosity about the role of writing in empowerment, I wanted the role the participants played in my study to validate their contributions and thereby empower them. The choice of an interpretive approach was therefore personal as well as academic.

Although interpretive inquiry has yet to come into its own in Canada, its suitability for adult literacy research is acknowledged in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Charnley & Jones, 1979; Hammond, 1989; Merriam, 1989).

Thomas, as early as 1983, called for more qualitative research into adult literacy in Canada (p. 107). Since my long-term goal is to make a contribution to the improvement of literacy practice, and since I was more interested in process than product, I was pleased to find support for using an interpretive approach which would "facilitate dialogue and communication between interested parties" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 91). My decision was reinforced by the comment by Guba and Lincoln (1982) that scientific or rationalistic research has had little or no impact on practice (p. 235). Interpretive accounts, conversely, "may influence practice by influencing the ways in which individual practitioners comprehend themselves and their situation . . . practices are changed by changing the ways in which they are understood" (p. 91). Merriam (1989) adds further support, saying that qualitative research has already contributed significantly to adult education, and "the current receptivity to this form of research is bound to lead to even better understandings of our practice" (p. 167).

Study Design

The study design is a vitally important aspect of a research project. As well, the "critical test of sense is the researcher's belief that . . . looking at the data through a specified screen, will produce meaningful results" (Allender, 1986, p. 185). The general design had to reflect my interest as a qualitative researcher in meaning as "embedded in people's experiences and mediated through the investigator's own perceptions" (Merriam, 1989, p. 166) and be consistent with the purpose of the study. In addition, a qualitative research design must be emergent and open to change (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 245; Owens, 1982, pp. 7, 11). As Owens paraphrases Guba, "The naturalistic inquirer, believing in unfolding multiple realities (through interactions with respondents that will change both them and the inquirer over time) and in grounded theory, will insist on a design that unfolds over time and which is never complete until the inquiry is arbitrarily terminated as time, resources, and other logistical considerations may dictate" (p. 6).

The resulting design consisted of five discrete but interacting and overlapping phases: introductory data exploration on a broad scale, data generation, data analysis and interpretation, data verification, and drawing conclusions.

In the early stages of the study, my interest in the problem grew as I gathered background information by reading widely in the field of adult literacy. My prior interest and experience in writing and teaching in a learner-centred environment helped to focus my attention as I developed the broad questions I wished to explore. The broad questions I initially developed, however, were to change as the study progressed.

As part of the data generation I had first to plan the research instruments. Since in qualitative research the investigator is the primary instrument, a major task was to ensure that I was as well prepared as possible for the task. The methods I chose to use were interviews, participant observation and personal documents. I created an interview guide (see Appendix A), which I regularly modified throughout the study in response to the data generated and the participants' input. I also decided to record the data in the form of transcripts and a research log.

Data analysis began early in the data generation phase, though at first it consumed only a small portion of time. I immersed myself in the data as it accumulated, then coded and sorted it as patterns began to emerge. The fourth activity, data verification, also took place concurrently with the generation and analysis phases in the form of checking it, and my interpretations, with the participants.

The final phase, drawing conclusions, began early in an extremely tentative form. In a sense, the preconceptions which had led to the selection of the problem and focus of the study informed the process of making inferences from the data. This phase of the study naturally was most intense in the latter stages.

The teaching/learning component of the study was originally to take the form of one-to-one tutoring. The setting and method were later changed by circumstance to a literacy program which used computers. The four learner/participants were co-investigators in that they knew the purpose and methods of the investigation; they shared in the determination of writing and study goals and methods; and they described and reflected on the meaning of the experience of learning to write. The learners' reactions influenced the direction of the learning process and even the focus of the study.

Summary Statement

When I began to explore the literacy issue, I found several recurrent themes in the literature. At least one-fifth of Canadians are considered illiterate, and the personal and economic costs of the problem are enormous. But literacy is a multi-faceted phenomenon with several definitions. Programs have traditionally attracted and kept only a small percentage of the adults who need them, although recent innovative approaches offer promise. One of

the innovations in the last decade is to emphasize writing, especially the language experience approach, as a more holistic and empowering way to teach literacy.

Although literacy learners have been asked about their feelings and needs, they have rarely been asked specifically about writing. Therefore, I chose to conduct a qualitative study to explore the attitudes of some literacy learners toward writing.

In the next chapter of this report, I will discuss the literature which gives the theoretical and research background to the study, followed in Chapter 3 by a detailed description of the research methodology. In Chapter 4 I will portray the study's context through a description of the setting and profiles of the four participants. In Chapter 5 I report the participants' conceptions of writing, in Chapter 6 their self-concepts as writers, and in Chapter 7 the factors they perceived as instrumental in learning to write. Chapter 8 contains my conclusions and recommendations.

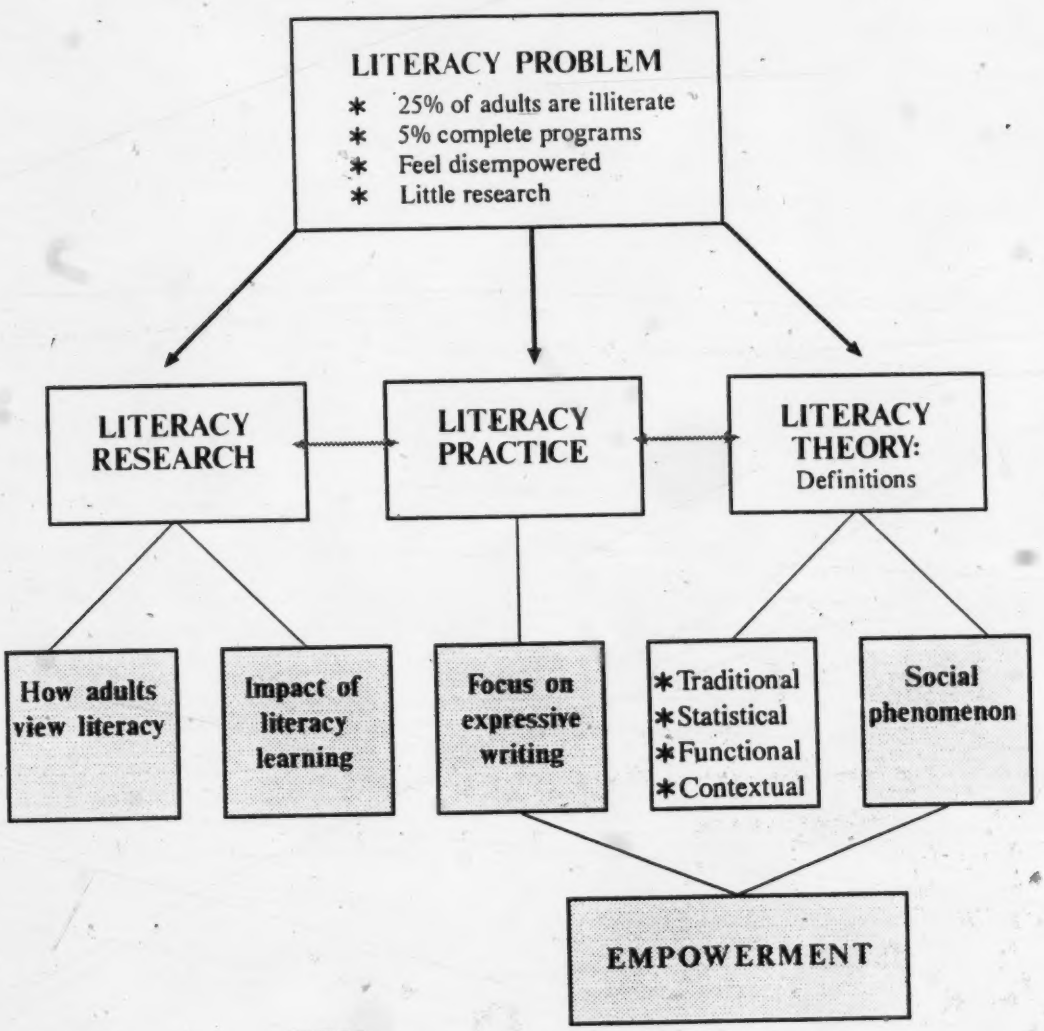

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Research Problem

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Introduction

The reading of literature from several areas, including literacy research and theory, studies of adult literacy programs, adult learning theory, writing theory and research, and qualitative methodology, was an ongoing part of this study. Prior to the study I read first the literature defining literacy, and found in it ubiquitous references to the notion of empowerment, principally in relation to writing. My exploration of these three areas--definitions, empowerment and writing--and my excitement about the ideas I found influenced the focus of the study, and this choice of focus was reinforced when I tried to discover whether adult learners agreed with the scholars that writing was significant in literacy education.

Although in the past few years learners' views of literacy had been researched and reported, I could find nothing specifically about writing. Writing research, also, seemed to be based entirely on work with children and professional writers. Because I had decided to teach my study participants, I reviewed the current literature on pedagogical approaches to writing, focusing on the language experience and process approaches. During data analysis I read further in qualitative research techniques, and reread most of the literature when interpreting the findings.

The literature which finally was most relevant to the research problem fell into five general categories: definitions of literacy; the notion of writing as an empowering activity; the language experience and process approaches to writing; impact studies of literacy learning on adults; and principles of emergent literacy learning. A substantial sample of the germane works is reviewed here.

Definitions of Literacy

Until we are clear about our definitions of literacy, we cannot adequately design and deliver programs, nor evaluate their success. The recurrent theme among the many literacy definitions offered in the past decade is the realization that there is no one definition, that literacy can be measured only relativistically (Cervero, 1985, p.50). Consensus is unlikely: a pluralistic conception is here to stay. Darville (1989) cites ten sources to support his claim that literacy encompasses diverse skills and social relations, concluding that "this has become a commonplace assertion in the literature of the field" (p. 25). Many others agree that literacy is not one kind of skill, and each definition has validity. Scribner (1984) asks that we "'disaggregate' various levels and kinds of literacy" (p. 19) and look instead at the varieties of definitions and their place in literacy programs. Not only do definitions of literacy within one society change over time, but also every culture and subculture defines literacy differently

(Brodkey, 1986, p. 47). And within each cultural definition, there are still levels of distinction which need to be clarified if the literacy community is to avoid talking at cross-purposes (Fagan, 1989b). The many facets of literacy can include knowledge and information, the skills of reading and writing, behaviour in social and work contexts, and concepts of the self. Literacy can be an educational or a social issue.

Several scholars have attempted to provide clarity within the divergence. Clark (1984), for instance, examines four categories of definition. The traditional is skill-based and means being able to read and write a minimal amount. The statistical, the definition used by Statistics Canada, measures literacy by years of formal schooling. The functional, including numeracy with reading and writing skills, describes literacy in terms of having the necessary skills to function within one's community. The contextual refers to the ability to "read and write at whatever level of comprehension that is commensurate with an individual's perception of personal responsibility, needs, socio-cultural context, and expectations for the future" (p. 142). The latter category of definition encompasses Charnley and Jones' (1979) more succinct statement that "an illiterate adult is an adult who thinks he has a reading or writing problem" (p. 171).

A second approach to examining literacy is represented by Norman and Malicky's (1986) conclusion, after surveying recent definitions, that perhaps literacy can and should be viewed as a social rather than an educational achievement (p. 12). Scribner (1986) enriches their concept with her metaphors for looking at literacy in three ways, as adaptation (p. 9), power (p. 11), and state of grace (p. 13). Her adaptation metaphor most closely matches the functional definition. The power metaphor refers to political power and closely parallels the definition implicit in the literacy work of Freire, Kozol, Shor, Elsasser and John-Steiner. The state of grace connotes the magical condition or "special virtues" (p. 13) ascribed to the literate person. The metaphors could be considered, respectively, as social, political, and personal empowerment.

Notions of empowerment crop up repeatedly in the literature of literacy definitions and seem to constitute the second common theme. The term has come to be used in a variety of contexts with differing connotations. Coming from the politics of liberation in the third world, it has been adopted by other groups fighting oppression. Initially at least, empowerment meant enabling disadvantaged people to take control over their own lives. For those operating from the literacy-as-a-social-issue paradigm, empowerment is political.

Among those who use the terms "power" and "empowerment" in the political sense as an explicit or implicit component of their definitions of literacy are Freire (1968; 1987; in Bruss & Macedo, 1985), Giroux (1985), Kozol (1985), Sauvé (1987), Scribner (1984), Shor (1980, 1987), and Willinsky (1986). They present, with differing emphases, the theory that literacy has been used historically by dominant classes to maintain the status quo, to ensure the perpetuation of a disempowered class of have-nots to do the dirty work. From this perspective the task of literacy education becomes the empowerment of non-literate people.

When Darville (1989) synthesizes the two strands or themes in literacy definitions, he argues that in addition to thinking about literacy having more than one form, we must "think about literacy as empowerment" (p. 26). His examples of literacy forms that "are part of the power of those who have power" (p. 26) fall chiefly into the functional literacy area, for example application forms, letters, and licences. He does, however, link them with Freire's notion of empowering people through enabling them to "name their world." Although Cox and Sanders (1988) talk about this definition of empowerment--allowing "the silent to speak"--as a literacy cliche, they add: "In a literate society, the written word is the source of authority and power. Those not in command of the written word, by definition, then, are powerless. It is in this

sense and context that literacy is 'empowering'" (p. 3). Empowerment therefore seems also to refer to adaptation, or functional skills.

Feminists and psychologists talk about empowerment in more personal terms. Empowerment includes naming one's experiences and reflecting on them, thus undergoing personal transformation at least in attitudes. Concrete action in society need not follow. Analogously, literacy learners could be described as being personally or psychologically empowered when they feel they can reach Scribner's (1986) state of grace, joining the magic circle of the literate.

For the purposes of this study I choose to define empowerment as positive transformation of self-concept (personal empowerment), ability to function in a literate society (social empowerment), and capacity to effect change in one's world (political empowerment).

Writing as an Empowering Activity

Even for the scholars whose notion of empowerment is more social (functional literacy, adaptation) or personal (improved self-concept, state of grace), writing tends to take precedence over reading as the activity or skill which affords more power to the learner. Although literacy skills include both reading and writing, the latter has been neglected in the literature until very recently. Literacy programs have tended to focus first on reading but there is a growing awareness of reading and writing as interdependent

halves of the same process, best learned in a "holistic context" (Squire, 1983, p. 586), with writing as the more empowering of the two halves.

The literature linking writing with empowerment falls into two categories: writing as power in that it gives learners a voice, and writing as vital to cognitive development, without which no other empowerment through learning can occur. Historically, the role of popular writing has been to speak out against injustice (Willinsky, 1986, p. 40). Today, scholars in the literacy-as-social-achievement camp also view writing as a means to protesting and ultimately changing the status quo. Freire (1968; 1987; in Bruss & Macedo, 1985) is the most pervasively influential of these scholars and during the past 20 years North American interest has grown in literacy education based on the pedagogy underlying his Brazilian literacy programs. Writing is central to Freirian programs, which are specifically dedicated to political empowerment or liberation, aiming to make society more just through raising the consciousness of the learners.

When Brodkey (1986) notes that third world literacy campaigns, based on the Freirian approach, "emphasize writing" (p. 52), she supports her claim by reference to the 1961 Cuban literacy campaign which resulted in 700,000 "letters to Fidel". Another example of her theory is the work of Elsasser (Fiore & Elsasser, 1987) at the College of

the Bahamas. The women in Elsasser's literacy program wrote copiously from the beginning, from lists to paragraphs to letters of public protest. This concept of giving previously silenced people a voice through writing is articulated by Brodkey: "When literacy means writing as well as reading, the illiterate other is projected as someone who 'talks' back. . . ." (p. 52). She sees dialogue as essential to literacy learning, which means that learners are writing in order to take an active role in their learning.

Darville (1987) links empowerment with writing again when he addresses the question: "How can we think usefully about literacy as a progressive force, one that aids people's empowerment" (p. 17)? His exploration of the language experience approach is based on his assumption that writing is the empowering component of the process of becoming literate. Further support for this belief comes from Hunter (1985). Advocating community-based programs that meet various needs of the disadvantaged, she states that "if literacy needs emerge, more emphasis may be placed on writing and self-expression than on reading . . . the goal is the increased empowerment of participants in areas of their choosing" (p. 5). Writing is central, also, to Sauvé's (1987) approach to literacy education because "to accept others' definitions of our world is to accept that world as it is. To work at putting our own words to the

reality of our experience is to begin to have some measure of control over the nature of our reality" (p. 19).

The second way in which writing is seen as empowering is in its role in the development of cognitive skills. Writing can be not only a way for adult non-literates to express what they already know, but also a way to become conscious of things they were previously unaware of. To Erdman (1984), writing is essential to the processes of learning to think critically and develop cognitively. She defines critical thinking as the capacity to question and reflect on what has previously been taken for granted. Although her definition is very close to Freire's concept of conscientization, when she talks about the liberating effects of writing she is more concerned with personal transformation than political change. Basing her discussion of writing-as-learning on the work of Giroux, Mackie and Van Nostrand, she explains that the cognitive process involved is the increasing awareness of topics and relationships, of connecting the writer's inner and outer worlds. If writing encourages learners to increase awareness of relationships, it "can become an integrating, enabling and transforming activity--a potentially liberating activity" (p. 4).

Squire (1983) concurs when he describes composing and comprehending as interrelated thinking skills. He sees writing as essential to cognition because "it is a process which actively engages the learner in constructing meaning,

in developing ideas, in relating ideas, in expressing ideas" (p. 582).

Fiore and Elsasser (1987) and Finlay and Faith (1987) are literacy scholars and practitioners who also base their work on a belief in the efficacy of writing as a tool for cognitive development. They explicitly link the linguistic theories of Vygotsky (1962) with the liberatory approach of Freire in designing their literacy programs in both the third world and North America. Freire's use of generative words or themes which move the learner from individual experience to broader social contexts parallels Vygotsky's view of learning to write as a process involving the mastery of cognitive skills such as categorization and synthesis, moving the learner from a private inner speech to the shared language of public communication (in Fiore & Elsasser, 1987, p. 88). To Rigg and Kazemek (1983), who consider themselves humanists rather than political idealogues, dialogue, as advocated by Freire and Brodkey, should be the basis for literacy education (p. 28) because writing is a cognitive process. Like reading, it "is a process that enables the writer to explore and understand the world and herself . . . it is a tool with which to think and learn. . . ." (p. 28).

Approaches to Writing

Not all approaches to writing are credited with contributing to empowerment. Methods that separate writing from reading and approaches that emphasize mechanical skills

and filling in the blanks (Brodkey, 1986, p. 51; Erdman, 1984, pp. 6-7; Osmond, 1986, p. 35; Rigg & Kazemek, 1983, p. 28; Squire, 1983, p. 585) are blamed in part for the lack of success of many traditional programs. Instead, in the fields of both emergent and adult literacy, a number of principles are recommended as critical to successful writing programs. One is that writing and reading be taught holistically, and with the idea that the learners will use both as means to understand themselves and their world (Erdman, 1984; Elsasser & John-Steiner, 1987; Finlay & Faith, 1987; Rigg & Kazemek, 1983). Two other fundamental principles are that writers should write about what they care about (Brodkey, 1986, p. 52) and share what they write with an audience (Coe, 1986; Darville, 1987; Erdman, 1984). Language experience and process writing are two commonly used approaches which apply these principles to teach writing for empowerment.

The Language Experience Approach

In the literature of adult education, the approach to writing most frequently cited as successful and empowering is language experience. Several variations of this strategy exist, all sharing certain key elements. In this approach, which was adapted from the language experience methods first used with children, the learners use their own experiences and language as text material, either written by themselves or using the instructor as a scribe. The instructor's role

is then to teach language conventions through the learners' own stories.

Dialogue is a central component. That dialogue can be between teachers and learners, among learners in groups, or between learners and more distant respondents through letter writing or published work. It consists, at least in the early stages, of stories. "Women's stories have not been told," announces Carol Christ (1980, p. 1) at the beginning of her study of women's writing and spiritual quest. Nor have the stories of other silenced people, including the non-literate. Their stories, the experiences they bring to language, usually contain a narrative element and can take many forms, including personal narratives, poetry, songs, letters, conversations, anecdotes, family histories, and journals. Using learners' stories as the content of both reading and writing, the language experience approach is becoming established as a literacy methodology. Because it includes dictated stories for the non-writer, even the beginner can articulate his world. And because the stories become the reading texts, the approach is holistic.

Darville (1989) speaks persuasively of its potential: "The discourse about language experience conveys a sense of the transformative power of the act of writing," which in turn is important because it gives a voice to those who are normally not heard in the dominant literacy (p. 31). One reason for this potential, as seen by Norman and Malicky

(1986), is that adult learners see their own language in written form, which renders the reading content personally meaningful (p. 14). Language experience activities form the core of the writing model which Rigg and Kazemek (1983) advocate: "structured writing activities around a cognitive-discovery model of the writing process" (p. 29).

The exchange of stories, or dialogue component, is also crucial. Erdman (1984) stresses that learners should share their writing with other learners (p. 6). Brodkey (1986) describes an "authentic" and motivating experience of dialogue: a class of literacy teachers and an ABE class exchanged letters about their lives over a period of several months. This exchange, she reports, narrowed the gap between a group of literates and a group of non-literate "others" as they learned to understand each others' lives (p. 52). Publishing learners' stories constitutes another form of dialogue, and many Canadian literacy programs now do this. Willinsky (1986) encourages this trend, so long as it includes acceptance of vocabulary, structures and dialects that differ from the middle-class educated standard language.

The benefits believed to accrue from the dialogic process are several: an increase in self-worth from seeing one's experience in writing, a sense of community from discovering shared experiences, a growth in critical thinking skills from reflecting on those experiences, a

change from seeing books as alien and mysterious to familiarity from producing one's own, and a growing empowerment from the experience of finding one's voice.

Cautionary voices, in reaction to the rush to leap onto the "new writing" bandwagon, are raised periodically. Sooner or later many learners will want to write in forms other than the narrative and will want to write "correctly" in formal standard English. Willinsky (1986) warns of the potential shallowness of popular literacy (p. 42), and Darville (1989) cautions that language experience can become "condescension and disempowerment" if the student is asked to do no more than express personal experience. Against the narrative literacy of language experience he sets what he calls organizational literacy, that of the organizations which have power in our society, and which take such forms as regulations, contracts, applications and laws (p. 26). He advises the literacy teacher to bridge the two literacies by using generative stories, moving from personal experience to a reflection on that experience and an analysis of how organizations work.

Dialogue, he claims, is vital to this stage also--the teacher must write back to the students with stories of people who have gained control of their worlds and encourage exploration of contrasts grounded in the stories, such as the worker's complaints set against the employer's view, the welfare recipient's frustrations compared with the social

worker's case notes, or the patient's fear juxtaposed with the doctor's case history. Boomer (1985), Colvin and Root (1987) and Norton (1988), provide concrete and detailed methodologies for using the language experience approach, including steps required to gain control of formal English.

The language experience approach to writing, then, is believed by many theorists to contribute to the empowerment of adult literacy learners. When they create the content of their own literacy activities, they begin to take control over their own learning and their own lives. The content itself, once written and reflected upon, can provide insights into the experience it expresses; and the processes of writing and reflecting will develop cognitive skills. Looking for and sharing meaning in the stories satisfies the human need to make sense out of experience, to create order out of chaos, to find connections. Moving from the personal narrative into functional literacy competencies is also possible in the language experience approach.

Process Writing

Process writing as a technique for writing development has been mainly identified with children. The literature on school-aged learners abounds with process writing commentaries, and the approach has been widely adopted in schools throughout the 1980s in most of the English-speaking world. Canada is no exception.

The term "process writing" refers "generally to an approach to the teaching of writing which attempts to look at the processes a writer goes through and to facilitate these processes" (Nolan, 1988, p. 196). The name and the approach began with Emig's (1971) and Graves' (1973) studies of writing processes in adolescents and children. Teachers of writing, however, have probably always encouraged some of its principles, for instance prewriting and revising. The 1974 Bay Area Writing Project in the United States, which was adopted as the National Writing Project in the early 1980s, encouraged prewriting, the acceptance of the students' natural language, conferencing, and publication.

Graves' (1983) report of research into how children learn to write, and his recommendations for how teachers can facilitate the writing process, has probably been the single most influential and popular work in the field. Others who have refined and adapted the approach in secondary education are Atwell (1987), Britton (1970), Elbow (1981), Emig (1983), and Macrorie (1985). Even more recently, the whole language approach to emergent literacy is based on many of the principles shared by the Bay Area Writing Project and the work of Graves. According to Gaber-Katz and Horsman (1988), "whole language is the theoretical basis for using language experience stories" (p. 118). All of these new pedagogic approaches to writing share a philosophical basis and many techniques.

Willinsky (1986) believes that these movements, which he calls "the new writing," have their roots in popular literacy movements dating back to Renaissance Europe. Both Nolan (1988) and Willinsky, however, warn about potential problems of trivializing and oversimplifying writing with the wholesale adoption of approaches that are based on insufficient research. Willinsky nevertheless believes, as does Coe (1986), that process writing is a valuable approach because it works even with students who do not have the educational advantages of a literate, middle-class home background.

The process, as described by Coe (1986), Graves (1983), Nolan (1988) and Willinsky (1986), consists of five stages. The first is prewriting. Activities to motivate the students and assist them to generate ideas and choose their own topics can include conferences, brainstorming, daydreaming, and making outlines. Next the students put their ideas in draft form, and continue through varying stages of reformulation or revision of a piece of writing. During the third phase they will "select, compose, read, select, compose, read" (Graves, p.226). Once this phase seems complete, the students edit the piece of writing for mechanics. Publication in some form is the final stage. Conferences with both peers and teachers are important during the entire process, and the teacher's role throughout is intervention in order to facilitate the process itself.

Coe (1986) adds to this the reminder that we should think of writing as a communicative process with a purpose, an audience, and an occasion (p. 293). These three concepts were central to the Bay Area Writing Project, but are not specifically mentioned by Graves. Graves (1983) does, however, stress the development of the writer's voice, the driving force underlying all parts of the writing process: "This voice is the frame of the window through which the information is seen" (p. 228), and it influences the choice of topic, the organization, and word selection.

Language experience and process writing approaches can complement each other. By putting their own experiences into their own words, learners are choosing topics which motivate them and they are using their own voices. Although in language experience the beginner's words may be dictated to the teacher, Graves encourages instead the use of invented spelling (Walshe, 1981, p. 10) to allow new learners to start writing their own language. After drafting with either method, peer and teacher conferences assist in the revision and editing processes, and publication is a desirable stage in both approaches. Both approaches share a belief that writing is vital to the development of cognitive skills.

Although the term empowerment is conspicuously absent from the process writing literature reviewed here, nevertheless process writing is very much the approach used

by literacy workers of a liberatory persuasion, notably those mentioned earlier who base their programs on Vygotsky and Freire.

In Elsasser's program (Fiore & Elsasser, 1987), the women began by brainstorming to choose the topic of wife battering. They wrote and shared their personal reactions to and experiences of the topic. Revision and editing, through conferences and group sharing, accompanied the further movement to recording the commonalities of their experience and researching wife battering as a social phenomenon. Finally they published a letter requesting improved laws, shelters, and police attitudes.

The theme of work is explored through a similar process by Shor's (1987) New York college students. Although they do not choose their own topic, the students begin with prewriting in the form of listing work experiences. They then move into the writing of personal work experiences, peer sharing, listing commonalities of experiences, abstracting general themes from the specifics, and finally they construct public proposals of work redesign. Other examples are the decontextualizing activities used by Finlay and Faith (1987) and Elsasser and John-Steiner (1987). The teaching of writing in these programs, by encouraging movement from private experience--the learners own stories and words--to public expression, blends language experience and process writing.

Adult Learners' Views of Literacy Learning

Until the mid 1980s, a common complaint in the literature was that adult non-literates were silent about their attitudes to illiteracy and to literacy learning. Rigg and Kazemek (1983) expressed indirectly the need for more research regarding the role of literacy in adults' lives when they blamed the lack of literacy program appeal on the basing of the programs on untested assumptions about literacy and the adult learner. Literacy education, they say, is something the teacher does to and for the learner, without considering the students' needs (p. 26). Agreeing that programs reach few non-literates, Hunter (1985) believed the programs never will attract more students if they remain as they are: "Literacy skills may be an important component for their (non-literates') well-being but their diagnosis of their needs--not ours--should be the basis for program development" (p. 2). Scribner (1986) also argued for literacy programs that are responsive to learners' perceived needs (p. 15).

Since then many researchers have leaped into the void, tape recorders in hand, to interview adult literacy learners about their feelings and their needs. We now have many reports of adults' views about literacy in general and about learning to read. We hear chiefly from people who are already in programs, and therefore accessible to researchers. The adults who are not actively seeking

solutions to their illiteracy "problem" by enrolling in programs may not view their illiteracy as a problem at all. As Fingeret (1982) asks, "Do they share our overwhelmingly positive attitude toward learning to read and write? Do they share our condemnation of illiteracy" (p. 1)?

When Pillay (1986) began to seek answers to these questions, her study of four women literacy learners revealed diverse motivations to become literate. These included the functional goals of reading and writing for employment and the tasks of everyday life (social empowerment) and the personal goals of wanting to replace feelings of shame with pride, confidence, control and involvement with others (personal empowerment). The impact of literacy learning for the women in Pillay's study was generally very positive. The learners reported pleasure with the improvement in their reading and writing skills. They felt more hope for the future, found their relationships with family (except spouses) and friends improved, and they displayed or expressed increased self-esteem and confidence, a sense of control over their lives, and enjoyment of their increased activity.

Calamai (1987) also recounted the feelings of non-literates; for example, "It (illiteracy) tears you apart inside. All the people I've let down. It's just one lie after another" (p. 57). Callwood (1990) writes of the lack of freedom and self-esteem of non-literates: "The common

emotional characteristics of people who can't read are depression and self-dislike" (p. 41). In their report of an Edmonton study, Norman and Malicky (1986) cited other recent studies which show that adult non-literates feel dependent and fall prey to blaming themselves as victims--if they are illiterate they must be "dumb" (p. 13). For the Edmonton learners, "social-personal goals seemed to outweigh the importance of specific functional goals" and literacy was viewed "as a means to self-fulfillment" (p. 13).

These themes are repeated also in the writing of adult learners. With the very recent flowering of publications of the works of new adult writers, we have their written voices to confirm the interpreted material from researchers' interviews. Boudrias (1988), for instance, writes: "For many years I didn't know how to read or write. I was illiterate. Being illiterate is the most frightening thing. It's like being in a prison of your own self. . . ." (p. 72). Parsons (1988) records the impact of finding her own voice: "As we walk through the darkness of our life to survive, we see, we hear, we talk. I can write now and tell you the real story of what we go through" (p. 23).

The very few studies of adult learners' views of the nature and importance of writing tell us that learners may have restricted views of what is involved. When Fagan (1988a) explored the conceptions of literacy held by 52 Alberta literacy learners, his findings supported other

research. The majority of the respondents did not see preplanning as part of writing, and good writing consisted of good handwriting and spelling. Forester (1988) and Osmond (1986) also noted the primary concern with spelling among adult literacy learners.

The current research shows, then, that many adult non-literates feel disempowered--shamed, secretive, unable to be involved--by their illiteracy. Becoming literate results in improved self-concept and the sense that doors are opening. Although some do want to tell their stories, it begins to seem that many others need considerable help to get beyond viewing writing as a limited mechanical process.

Writing in Emergent Literacy Theory

We do not yet know how adults compare with young children on attitudes to, and cognitive processes in, literacy learning. Cognitive development in children, including literacy learning processes, has been thoroughly researched, and we have considerable information about general learning processes in adults (Knowles, 1987; Knox, 1981). The development of writing skills has been studied less, but we do have information. Much less is known about how adults become literate, and most studies have been of reading development, not writing. Models for adult literacy programs are often based on programs for young children, although such influential factors as the learners' affective state, prior knowledge and language competence, and the

nature of textual materials (Fagan, 1987, p. 124) may differ.

In his study comparing the reading processes of 20 adults reading at the grade 4 level or below, and 83 children in grades 2 and 4, Fagan (1987) found both differences and similarities. While the adults' processing behaviour was like that of the grade 2 readers, the adults used their wider knowledge to interact with the texts and therefore were more successful in "constructing and recalling meaning from the text" (p. 133). This typical attribute of adult learners possibly has implications for learning to write also: adult learners may bring not only greater experience and knowledge of the world but also a greater oral vocabulary and experience with language.

Children's attitudes to writing are recorded mostly in the form of testimonials and ethnographic reports as new writing programs are observed and documented. "What has been repeatedly found is that the students are writing marvelous things and that they are proud of what they write" (Willinsky, 1987, p. 115). The new writing is claimed to show improvement in the students' understanding of what writing is, their attitude to writing, and their regard for themselves as writers. Willinsky compared the understanding and attitudes of 109 grade 1 students, 57 in a skill-sequenced program and 52 in a process writing program. Somewhat surprisingly in the light of popular assumptions,

he discovered that the students experiencing the new writing approach showed a decline in their positive responses to writing, and those using the skill-sequenced approach were equally positive. Both groups made similar gains in their concepts of themselves as writers. He concludes by calling for more and varied research on the impact of different introductions to literacy, because "whether writing out of oneself is a means of creating a self-concept of greater agency remains to be established" (p. 120). This need for research is as true for adults as for children.

Summary Statement

We need to think of literacy as a complex phenomenon which, as a social issue, includes the notion of empowerment. Writing may be the more empowering half of the holistic process of composing and comprehending. Of the possible approaches to writing, the two most frequently advocated are language experience and process writing, especially when empowerment is a goal. Adult learners have told us about the costs of illiteracy and the impact of learning to read, and we have recorded the development of both cognitive and writing skills in children. But this research is incomplete, and the voices of adults need to be heard.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In Chapter Three I discuss in detail the research methodology that I chose and used in this study. First I talk about interpretive inquiry: what it is, its place in the total research spectrum, its appropriateness to the research problem of the meaning of writing to adult learners, and the strengths and weaknesses of its methodological stance. In the next two sections I describe the specific processes I used to establish contact with the participants and to generate data with them. Then I explain the chosen methods and procedures of data analysis, essentially the discovery and identification of emerging themes. The last four sections deal with the trustworthiness of the findings, researcher effect, ethical concerns, and reporting style.

The Choice of an Interpretive Approach

I chose interpretive inquiry to explore the four adult literacy learners' perceptions of the nature and importance of writing because I was interested in the contextualized truths of their subjective experiences with writing. Understanding behavior requires more than simply observing it. Carr and Kemmis (1986) assert that human actions cannot be observed as if they were natural objects: "They can only be interpreted by reference to the actor's motives,

intentions or purposes in performing the action. To identify these motives and intentions correctly is to grasp the 'subjective meaning' the action has to the actor" (p. 88). Therefore if we are interested in understanding human behavior, we will have to ask those doing the behaving about the meaning of their actions to themselves. In Owens' (1982) words, "qualitative inquiry seeks to understand human behavior and human experience from the actor's own frame of reference. . ." (p. 7). Guba and Lincoln (1982) also support using an interpretive stance to understand human behavior by going beyond observation of tangible events, because "it is not these tangibles that we care about, but the meaning and interpretation people ascribe to or make of them, for it is these constructions that mediate their behavior" (p. 239).

In seeking to discover what writing means to adult learners, therefore, it was not enough to observe what they do and how they appear to be doing it, which could be documented quantitatively. I had to ask them about their subjective experience and accept their different meanings also. An acceptance of this notion of multiple realities--that each person's subjective perception constitutes a reality equally valid with all others'--is also central to the interpretive paradigm. As Guba and Lincoln (1982) put it: "There are as many constructions as there are people to make them" (p. 239).

Context is a vital determining factor in the making of constructions and informs the notion of multiple realities. When we explore the meanings of an experience to one participant in a particular context, we discover a version of that person's reality. We do not expect this to be the reality: "Generalizations are suspect, at best, and knowledge inevitably relates to a particular context" (Owens, 1982, p. 6). Time, place, and culture all help to determine context; and while it is important to describe the context of a study as fully as possible, Guba and Lincoln (1982) confirm that the information generated may not be generalizable (p. 247).

Before Data Generation: Making Contacts

By April, 1988, I had a problem to research and a lens through which to examine it. Next I had to find a literacy program and participants who might be interested in my study. Although I lived in Alberta at the time I was ready to begin making contacts, I would be moving to Saskatchewan the following September. In order to complete the research during my eight months' stay there I needed to have arrangements in place before arriving. I wrote to the major literacy program in the city where I would be living, outlined my interest, and sent a copy of the thesis proposal. Because I wanted to teach as well, I offered my services as a tutor to this volunteer tutoring program. The person in charge of literacy programming for the

organization responded with interest and we arranged to meet when I arrived in Saskatchewan.

By September a new woman, Mary, was in charge of the literacy program, but she was very enthusiastic about my research and did everything possible to facilitate it. Because of promised confidentiality to their program applicants, she even did the screening and phoning of potential participants for me. I took a tutor training program in the eclectic approach of the Literacy Volunteers of America (Colvin & Root, 1987) in September and October, and by the middle of October had begun tutoring three participants.

Suddenly at the beginning of November, however, I began a full-time job teaching a new literacy program for the Saskatchewan Department of Education in conjunction with the local community college. The three participants agreed, indeed were absolutely delighted, to come to the program. There was no charge to the learner and no formal accreditation to be received. Our relationships altered, of course, and at first I worried about this and its effect on the study. Instead of having one-to-one private tutoring time, the participants were now part of classes with 15 other learners. One eventually dropped out because her family left the city, but I continued to tutor the other two after class until the end of March--our originally agreed upon time. After it became apparent that the learners were

as comfortable with the new situation as with the former one, perhaps even more stimulated by it, I decided to choose two additional participants from the program.

At this point I sought permission from the college offering the program and from IBM, who created and provided the program, called P.A.L.S. I approached the Adult Basic Education coordinator at the college and the IBM Education and Public Relations Office in Atlanta, Georgia. Both were enthusiastic and gave me free rein.

The Investigation: Data Generation

The Sample

The purposively chosen sample includes three women and one man. All were born in Canada, of non-native ancestry, and live in mainstream society. One of the women is in her thirties, one in her forties, and one in her late fifties; the man is in his late twenties. Their backgrounds are varied in terms of geography, work, and life experience. Their educational backgrounds and their goals for literacy learning also differ. At the time of the study they were all in one literacy program, P.A.L.S., and all also had individual tutors concurrent to at least part of the study. Two had been in Adult Basic Education programs at some time in the previous ten years, and the other two were returning to a formal school setting for the first time since they were children.

A purposive sample is one chosen to fit one's purpose. In other words, the researcher selects participants according to the likelihood of their being able to provide the information desired. Therefore I wanted learners who were already able to write a little, even if they didn't write in their daily lives or had never written. Mary and I agreed, during the initial selection process, to ask applicants who were guesstimated to be at a grade 3 or 4 reading level and whose application forms indicated they could write a little. I thought that learners who already had some literacy skills would be the most likely to be able to practice writing during our time together. In six months, a non-literate person would probably not learn to write enough to talk about changes, and an advanced learner might be functioning already at a satisfactory level (to him/herself) when we began.

The two participants who came from the original tutoring program were chosen fairly arbitrarily, as already indicated, by Mary. When phoning applicants to match them with tutors, she briefly outlined my study and asked them if they would be willing to participate. One other difference from the usual tutoring commitment was that their tutoring time in terms of months (a normal commitment is 12 months) would be shorter because I was in the city temporarily only. The first three she asked agreed to be involved. At this time, the only criterion was the guesstimated reading level.

Next I met with the participants and talked in more detail about the study and what I would require from them in the way of interviews and written material. I also discussed the ethical issues, emphasizing confidentiality. There may, of course, have been a hidden element of coercion in that these learners were eager to begin their literacy learning and may have been so anxious for a tutor that they would have agreed to almost anything. I also made it very clear that if they chose for any reason to opt out of the study we would continue the tutoring relationship.

One comment made by all participants, in differing words, was that they wanted to do anything that would help people like themselves. All three were at the point where they had only recently decided to take action about their literacy problems and were still nervous about "coming out of the closet." But as long as confidentiality was assured, they wanted to contribute their experiences to literacy research. As will be observed later, the confidentiality issue lost all importance to the learners as the learning progressed. By the end of the research time, all participants were eager to go public.

The administration of an informal reading and writing inventory (developed locally for the tutoring program) to all three confirmed that they were in the grade 3 reading range. P.A.L.S. required Woodcock Reading Mastery scores

for each student, and these supported the informal inventory results.

When I began teaching P.A.L.S. at the end of November, and it began to seem likely that one participant would be leaving, I began to look for two more participants. A second intake into the course took place in January. After testing the applicants for this group, and after the students knew they were accepted into the course unconditionally, I began asking those in the grade 3 reading range about participation in my study. I used the same procedures that I had with the first ones. The first two I asked said that they would like to participate--in the words of one, "It would be an honour."

I cannot guarantee that I was not influenced subconsciously by my first impressions of these students when I asked them to participate, or that Mary didn't unconsciously look for applicants whose information sheets hinted at an interest in writing. We did not deliberately look for learners on this basis, because obviously the results would be biassed by this. I also did not deliberately choose students who seemed noticeably enthusiastic or articulate, although three study participants did turn out to have those qualities. In any case, a qualitative study requires an in-depth look at the particular rather than generalizability. But the

participants' attitudes to learning, and other personality traits, are important to the context of the study.

The Interviews

I chose the unstructured interview as the primary method of data collection because, according to Merriam and Simpson (1984), it allows exploration of "all possibilities regarding the information sought" (p. 133). The interviews were in-depth, taking the form of dialogue or conversation. I believe, as Weber (1986) does, that "in asking someone to participate in an interview, we are . . . extending an invitation to conversation" (p. 65). If we are interested in the interviewee solely as a provider of data, then we are not engaging in conversation, and would describe the interviewee as a subject, informant or respondent. "If, on the other hand, the invitation is genuine, the interviewer turns to the participant as one human being to another. . . ." (Weber, p. 65). My study required genuine conversation because the concern was with insights rather than questions, the interaction was one-to-one, there was mutual control of the dialogue, and analysis was to be negotiated to result in a shared understanding of meanings (Powney and Watts, 1987). Therefore I considered the interviewees to be participants in the research as well as in the teaching/learning component of the study. In actual fact, of course, I did have more power as the one "who records, asks the questions,

and decides how to deal with the interview material" (Weber, p. 67).

Measor (1985) identifies four issues for the interviewer in qualitative research: gaining access and building relationships, maintaining critical awareness of the replies, analyzing the context of the interview, and validating the data (p. 55).

The process of gaining access has already been partially described. Considerations of time and place were easily dealt with. All participants were eager to spend whatever time was necessary. I asked for two interviews of 1/2 to 1 hour each and two additional sessions of 1 to 2 hours to confirm the meanings of the data. They had considerable choice of location and each selected what was comfortable. Three interviews were held in my office near the classroom, one took place in my home, one in a participant's home, one in a booth in a small coffee shop during a quiet time, and two in private rooms in institutions familiar to the participants (a public library and a community college). One participant also taped her additional thoughts over a period of several weeks during her 70 kilometre drive to class. At the time of the initial interviews our relationships were just beginning to develop: we had met for one informal "getting to know each other" session and for two more formal orientations to the literacy

work we would be doing together and to the nature of my research.

Access to people involves being accepted and trusted by them (Measor, 1985, p. 61; Weber, 1986, p. 67). Weber offers the belief that "perhaps one accepts to be interviewed because in the very invitation there is a sense of trust and a confirmation of the participants as a human being of importance, as someone who knows something of value. . . . " (p. 67). The positive responses Mary and I received when we approached each participant supported this belief.

Gaining trust was probably easier for me as a teacher than it would have been as an observer. We had a common task to work on together immediately and the teaching was usually one-to-one, even in the classroom. I shared details of my own life and interests as situations allowed and brought materials to the participants when I found items which reflected their interests. Strong feelings of trust and confidence grew in each class, and this seemed particularly true for the four participants. The women, indeed, have continued to correspond since I left the city. The final interviews had much more of a comfortable conversational flow, probably because we had built relationships by then. The participants' anonymity and their opportunities to review the transcripts also contributed to the feelings of trust (Measor, 1985, p. 57).

The second issue, critical awareness, was more difficult to deal with. First, because in a sense it conflicts with the goal of sharing control over the interviews. Also because it is difficult to remain critically aware and at the same time have total rapport with the other person's world. Empathy is quickly shattered by requests to get back on track. I found strategies that helped to cope with these problems. One was to use naturally occurring pauses to glance at the interview guide, rather than interrupt a digression. Checking on contradictions and omitted themes came later, during or after interview transcription. I made notes of areas to follow up on, and came back to them during brief conversations before or after class and during the subsequent interviews.

To analyze the context of the interview, I kept notes immediately afterward of the time, length, and place of each interview, also of the interviewee's dress, and, insofar as I could remember, body language during the interview and comments and observed behavior when arriving and leaving (that is, when the tape recorder was turned off). I also kept notes while transcribing of places where I might have influenced the direction of the interview through overt responses to things said.

The validation concern which relates specifically to interviewing is the possible betrayal of the spoken word

(Weber, 1986, p. 70). Should I, the researcher, be faithful to the participants' meaning or to their verbatim quotes? I chose usually to present the meaning and to supplement my interpretations of the data through member checks, credibility checks, personal document analysis and observation.

For the group interview with other literacy learners that I used as a credibility check after the participants' data was generated, I employed a technique called the focus interview. Seated in a circle, the members of the group each gave his/her response, in turn, to the general question asked. No interruptions were allowed until each person who wished to speak had finished. At that point, group members could question each other or add comments. Then we moved on to the next question. The answer time for each individual in a focus interview is often restricted, but I did not limit it.

I tape recorded all the interviews and transcribed the tapes myself. Listening to intonations and other verbal cues was very helpful in recalling the interview experience and in deciding which themes were most important to the participants. Additional dialogue occurred with some of the participants in the form of letters and stories.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is "the most commonly-used qualitative method" (Burgess, 1985, p. 11). The reason,

according to Merriam and Simpson (1984), is that "because participants are frequently unaware of their behavior, having to recall or recount the past is not as productive as observing their behavior directly" (p. 134). Certainly I felt that observation of the participants while they were learning to write would allow me to find contradictions, confirm data, and add another perspective on their stated attitudes to writing. The two data collection strategies of interviewing and observation, in fact, enriched each other because "actions cannot be observed in the same way as natural objects. They can only be interpreted by reference to the actor's motive, intentions or purposes in performing the action" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 88). I had the opportunity to continually use feedback as I moved back and forth among the "transcribed conversations," "daily accounts or stories" and "passing comments" (van Manen, 1984, p. 60) through which the participants described their experiences, and my observations of their behavior.

A major decision for any observer is how much to share of the participants' experience. In addition, the observer must decide what role to take: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, or complete observer (Gold, 1958 in Ball, 1985, p. 26). In my case the decision was made more complex by the question of whether a researcher should take a teaching role (Burgess, 1985, p. 11). My role fell somewhere between participant-

as-observer, whose "activities are not concealed" but are secondary to the participation activities, and observer-as-participant, in which "the role of the observer is publicly known, and participation becomes a secondary activity" (Merriam and Simpson, 1984, p. 92). I was able to share in the activities but not in the experience, since I was obviously not a student. Defining this role answered one of the four questions that Merriam and Simpson pose for participant observers: What is the relationship between the observer and observed?

In developing observation techniques I was guided by their three remaining questions: What should be observed? How will one record the observations? What procedures will be used to ensure the accuracy of the observations? (p. 35).

I observed the participants' behavior in relation to writing: What did they choose to write? What were their attitudes--how reluctant or enthusiastic--to different parts of the writing process? What aspects of writing concerned them most as indicated by the amount of time they spent on them? What changes occurred in their attitudes and processes during their time in the course?

The Journal

I recorded the observations in a journal or research log. Support for using the journal comes from many sources. Merriam and Simpson (1984) advise using an investigator diary (p. 91); Owens (1982) states that the "basic component

of the audit trail is the investigator's log" (p. 13); and Guba and Lincoln (1982) recommend an investigator log for audits and reflexivity (p. 248). Mills (1959) also cites many advantages to the research journal:

> Many creative writers keep journals; the sociologist's need for systematic reflection demands it . . . (in the journal you) will try to get together what you are doing intellectually and what you are experiencing as a person . . . By serving as a check on repetitious work, your file also enables you to conserve energy. It also encourages you to capture 'fringe-thoughts' (e.g. dreams, overheard conversations) . . . these may lead to more systematic thinking, as well as lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience. (p. 196)

Owens' advice is more direct and concrete. He recommends recording all contacts, the reasoning behind every decision, intuitions as they occur, peer consultations, and all components of the thick description (p. 13). Thick description is the providing of enough information about the context of a study to "take the reader there" (p. 15) and to enable judgements about the transferability of the study methods and findings.

Accordingly I kept a research log throughout the research process--in fact, three logs. A fat coil-bound one stayed at the site to record observations of the

participants' behavior and their passing comments. I jotted notes in this each day at the end of classes. I kept a thinner scribbler at home for the recording of decisions, peer discussions, and random thoughts and intuitions. A third one, with erratic entries, was strictly for my feelings and thoughts about the research process itself, not for the recording of data as such.

The issue of the accuracy of the observations was more difficult to address. Great responsibility lies with the researcher herself, but "observers trained and practised in coding and recording and aware of the potential biases they bring to research contribute significantly to reliability of results" (Merriam and Simpson, 1984, p. 139). See "Researcher Effect" for a fuller discussion.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is primarily a quantitative technique, but it can be used for a qualitative purpose (Merriam and Simpson, 1984, p. 138). In this study I collected dated copies of all drafts of everything the participants wrote during our time together. Many of these were personal documents according to Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) definition: "Individuals' written first-person accounts of the whole or parts of their lives or their reflections on a specific event of (sic) topic" (p. 113), including solicited narratives and private letters. If writing and editing processes became important to the study, even to the point

that we decided to do a quantitative analysis of, for instance, the revision process, the raw data would then be available. But primarily I wanted to peruse it for comments about writing. I reminded the participants frequently of their right to withhold anything they did not wish me to use. They were keen to hand me all their writing, however, with the proviso that rough drafts remain anonymous if published.

Interpretation: Data Analysis

I continued to read the literature on qualitative research after I began the data generation, with the result that the analysis procedures grew increasingly refined as the study proceeded. The references I found most useful were Taylor and Bogdan's (1984) discussion of developing and verifying theory in qualitative studies (pp. 125-145), and Tesch's (1987) description of researchers' experience with emerging themes.

The first notion to guide me was that of data analysis as a spiral or flow rather than a step-by-step progression (Tesch, p. 231). Data analysis had begun even before the data generation, since preconceptions affected the conceptual framework, the research questions, the sampling and the instrumentation. It continued concurrently with data generation as a back-and-forth movement (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 25). Data generation constituted more

than 80% of the activity in the early stages, with a gradual switch to analysis in the latter phases (Owens, 1982, p. 12).

In order to describe the analysis procedures, however, I will talk about them as discrete stages: immersion in the data; recording ideas that may become themes; coding all the data as classification schemes developed; interpreting and finding language for the data; and finally verifying the findings.

Both Tesch (1987, p. 232) and Taylor and Bogdan (1984, p. 130) speak of beginning the analysis by becoming immersed in the data: reading and rereading all transcripts, notes and documents. I started this process with the initial interview transcripts and repeated it at approximately monthly intervals as the observation notes and personal documents accumulated. By the time I was immersed in the final interview transcripts, therefore, I had already begun noting themes in and coding earlier data, and verifying interpretations with the participants. After a break of almost two months caused by moving to Vancouver Island, I went back to the data as a whole again and for a period simply lived with it.

I used two approaches to working with the text details: looking at each statement for its theme or topic, and looking for the metathemes or categories in the experiences the participants were describing (Tesch, 1987, p. 232; van Manen, 1984, pp. 60-61). The result of this process was a

checklist of tentative themes which I then confirmed with the participants.

Because their reactions of recognition and agreement led me to believe I was on the right track, I began to categorize and streamline these themes. Next I devised a colour coding system for the themes supplemented by geometric shapes for body language and vocal inflection. I elected to code the latter two categories only when strong emotion was apparent or when the inflection or gestures appeared to contradict the spoken words.

When this was done I cut the notes according to code and placed them initially in three large envelopes for the three major categories that had developed. This involved photocopying pieces that overlapped categories, and adding description to each one in order to include as much context as possible (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 138). Unused data went into a fourth envelope. Sorting through each envelope came next, as I reflected on such questions as: What was the effect of the context of the data collection? Was this bit of data solicited or unsolicited? Was the data in the form of words or actions? How many of the other participants expressed the same theme? How are my own biasses affecting my choices and emphases (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, pp. 140-142)?

Clustering (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 27; Rico, 1983) was the technique I found most helpful in perceiving

patterns and relationships, placing each main category at the centre of the cluster and arranging the bits around it. This seemed to facilitate getting at what van Manen (1984) calls "knots in the webs of our experiences" (p. 59). Also useful was observing which categories and themes were ones that I had constructed and which were "those that have been abstracted from the language of the research situation" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 107). I found that each time I went through the sorted data I made major categorization changes, although the themes did not alter. Eventually the contents of each large envelope were placed in smaller ones and I was ready to write.

Trustworthiness

In the interpretive paradigm, the world view, the underlying assumptions, and the research strategies differ from those of the rationalistic paradigm. So do the criteria for determining the trustworthiness of the data. Some basic concerns are similar: the accuracy or truthfulness of the data, the applicability of the results to other groups, the consistency of the findings with those of similar studies, and the neutrality of the findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 246). But the strategies for promoting trustworthiness, and the terminology used, differ. Guba and Lincoln replace the notions of truth or internal validity with the concept of credibility; generalizability

or external validity with transferability; reliability with dependability; and objectivity with confirmability (p. 246).

Credibility

Five strategies suggested to safeguard credibility are prolonged and persistent data generation at the site (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p. 247; Owens, 1982, p. 14); peer consultation (Guba and Lincoln, p. 247; Owens, p. 15); triangulation (Guba and Lincoln, p. 247; Jick, 1979, p. 602; Measor, 1985, p. 73; Owens, p. 14); member checks (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 91; Guba and Lincoln, p. 247; Owens, p. 15); and thick description (Guba and Lincoln, p. 248; Owens, p. 15).

I spent approximately eight hours a week for a 12-week period with each of the four participants (some of this concurrent) and an additional two to four hours weekly over a further 10 weeks with two of them. This time was important to gain access, develop trust, test observations and biases, and identify relevant themes.

Peer consultation, to discuss my problems, concerns and insights with uninvolved but qualified peers, took several forms. I had lunch with Mary, the literacy volunteer coordinator, at least once a month throughout the data generation and analysis phases of the study and bounced my perceptions off her. Also once a month I met with another graduate student who was writing a thesis on political aspects of adult literacy. We each discussed our own

research, compared notes about our methodologies, made suggestions to the other, and frequently exchanged resources. Twice I had opportunities to talk about the study with researchers conducting literacy program evaluations, and they provided useful insights. On a cold, sunny Sunday morning I went for a three hour walk with two teachers of the P.A.L.S. program from other parts of the province, and a good chunk of our conversation centred on my investigation. When my thesis supervisor attended a conference in Saskatchewan in May, we were able to meet and talk through some of my problems. In addition, I met several times during the writing phase with two teachers who had recently completed qualitative studies in emergent literacy to discuss our methodologies and findings.

Triangulation, a metaphor from the navigational strategy of using several reference points to determine one's true position, is the use of different data sources and/or methods to investigate the same problem. It enables one to cross-check and verify information. I used one-to-one interviews with four participants on the same issues, a group interview, participant observations recorded in a journal, self-reports in the form of writing samples, and off-the-cuff remarks.

Member checks involve a continuous checking of the data and interpretations with those who help generate the information. I met both formally and informally with each

participant to read and discuss the transcriptions and my interpretations of each interview.

Another form of credibility check I used was to cross-check themes with other sources "to test the perceptions of different actors to given events" (Owens, 1982, p. 14). In this case the different actors were other literacy learners. This group interview covered the same general questions as the original interviews. It provided confirmatory data for many themes but also some useful negative cases.

The triangulation of methods, member checks, and journal notes provided the raw material for thick description.

Transferability

Transferability is made possible through this provision of thick description. Although as an interpretive researcher I discount generalizability because of a belief in the influence of context (Owens, 1982, p. 6), I believe with Guba and Lincoln (1982) that "some degree of transferability is possible under certain circumstances" (p. 247). The thick description in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 will, I hope, provide enough information about this investigation to enable another researcher to decide how much transferability is possible. The second strategy to assist in transferability was the selection of a purposive sample (Guba and Lincoln, p. 247).

Dependability

Dependability in this paradigm is not so much an issue of replicability as it is of stability of the findings. Because the study design is emergent, a new study would have to allow for changes in its design. Guba and Lincoln (1982) recommend first triangulation of methods (p. 247), which I have already discussed. The dependability audit, a second strategy, follows the process of the study. The audit trail will include the journal record of the methodological steps and decision points; peer consultations; raw data in the form of tapes, transcripts, observation notes and written documents; edited summary notes of the data; and interview guidelines (Owens, 1982, p. 13). All of this information is available if required.

Confirmability

Confirmability in a qualitative study replaces quantitative agreement. Can the truth of these particular findings be confirmed? To help achieve confirmability, Guba and Lincoln (1982) recommend triangulation again, practising reflexivity, and the confirmability audit (p. 248). To be reflexive, the researcher must examine her underlying assumptions about learning, her reasons for creating the study design, and her assumptions and biasses about the problem. I did this throughout the study in the at-home journal and have included comments throughout the report. The confirmability audit requires being able to trace each

finding "back through analysis steps to the original data" (Guba and Lincoln, p. 248).

Researcher Effect

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study assumes great importance: her interests, pre-understandings and biases will determine the selection of the problem and the design of the study, and her expertise in the data-generating and analysis techniques will affect the trustworthiness and significance of the findings (Allender, 1986, p. 184; Eisner, 1988, p. 15; Owens, 1982, p. 6; Peshkin, 1988; van Manen, 1984, p. 46). Moreover, the interaction between the researcher and the study participants will influence the data (Owens, p. 6).

This lack of objectivity is not a problem, however, so long as the total sense of the study design is coherent (Allender, p. 185). Eisner also quarrels with the rationalistic insistence on objective or value-free methods: "All methods and all forms of representation are partial and because they are partial, they limit, as well as illuminate what through them we are able to experience" (p. 19). The important task is to explicate the biases, to describe the interactions and the researcher's personal understanding as clearly as possible (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17).

We do not come to the research task as a <u>tabula rasa</u>. Rather than knowing too little about our research problem, we have chosen it because we care about it and may know too

much (Tesch, 1987, p. 236; van Manen, 1984, p. 46). Instead of pretending to have no preconceptions, "it is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions and theories. . . ." (van Manen, p. 46). This accords with Guba and Lincoln's recommendations for securing confirmability. Eisner (1988) also asks about the effect of our research methods on "what we can learn about educational practice" and the influence of our world view and values on "how we go about our work" (p. 15).

Measor (1985) recognizes this issue and suggests six tactics to identify biases: interview other researchers, write an educational autobiography, practise critical reflexive thought, write papers on 'doing research,' record the self-images you receive from participants, and use other research experience (p. 76). I talked with other researchers, practised reflexivity, recorded the self-images received from participants, and used another research experience in which I was a participant. I have included explication of these issues throughout the study report.

My decision to incorporate the roles of teacher and researcher was influenced by three sources. Hammond (1989) asks a series of questions to help the researcher become clear about the consistency between the research plans and the investigator's educational philosophy. The first one is "Will the research process be educative for those involved"

(p.115)? It was important for me to be able to answer "Yes," and the only way I could do so was to teach the participants something they wanted to know. The second inspiration came from Carr and Kemmis' (1986) discussion of the movement to extend the professionalism of teachers by providing them with opportunities to engage in educational research. Erdman (1987) provided the third impetus in her discussion of reflecting on teaching: "It is through the process of reflection that we can be critical thinkers about our own teaching and institutions and actors, empowered to use what we learn to improve the programs in which we work" (p. 21).

I also believed that my decision to instruct the learners would enrich the study. For one thing, I could describe the context of the learning experience much more fully as a participant in it than as an observer. Secondly, I would not be yet another academic coming in to seek self-disclosure and leaving nothing behind of direct benefit to the participants. As their teacher, paid or volunteer, I was able to give something back. Also, as an experienced teacher, I knew that one of my strengths was to encourage learners to have confidence in their own abilities and to trust their own thoughts and ideas. I believed that the information I received from them would be correspondingly richer and more truthful than if our relationship were the more superficial one of observer and observed. This

decision seemed also to set the stage more authentically for participatory research--we were working together on the problem of what helped most in learning to write. The how of learning to write, which had not been a significant part of the initial design, took on increasing importance during the study because of the participants' emphasis on it.

Who I am, therefore, has affected this study, as has my participation as a teacher. Further, in the interviewing process I possibly had more effect on the data than in any other way. Merriam and Simpson (1984) advise that in unstructured interviewing the researcher "becomes the research instrument" (p. 130), and she "must have skill and knowledge in order to gather valid and reliable data" (p. 133). In addition to personality and skill, the interviewer's age, gender, ethnicity and social class will affect the data (Ball, 1985, p. 33; Measor, 1985, p. 74). Gender, in particular, could have an impact. Both Measor (p. 74) and Pillay (1986, p.10) decided that their best informants were female. They speculate that gender identification with the researcher was part of the reason. Ball, however, stresses that "gender sharing is not a magic key to unlock good data" (p. 33).

I was not looking for effects of gender in the study, and decided that since three of my participants were women and the credibility check group would be mixed, there was no problem. Regarding skill, I had taken an interviewing

course in a university journalism department and had considerable practice with interviews for journalistic purposes. The journalism course had included training in observation, and I had worked as a practicum supervisor at the University of Victoria, a further experience in observation. In addition my graduate program included two research courses. As a teacher I had 12 years' experience teaching secondary English and five years' experience as a volunteer tutor of adults.

Ethical Concerns

Competence, as an investigator and a teacher, is an ethical issue also. Having done what I could to assure it, my next ethical concern was to ensure that the participants knew their rights and understood fully what they were agreeing to. Therefore I explained that the research was to find out what some adult literacy learners felt about writing, both before and after learning to write. I tried to demystify the notion of research by describing in plain language the procedures and the nature and length of the interviews and data checks. I also explained why I would be keeping notes about what they were writing and how they seemed to feel about what they were doing. In addition, I asked if I could have copies of their writing as we went along.

I told them that I would probably benefit from the study by earning my Master's degree, and that I hope the

results might improve literacy classes for other learners in the future. I could promise them no direct benefits except through the teaching, and they would receive this benefit even if they decided to opt out of the study. I emphasized that they were free to opt out at any time and tried to remove any sense of coercion by assuring them I had lots of other students I could ask to participate. We brainstormed possible risks but didn't come up with any so long as the information was reported anonymously.

That reporting, I said, would be in the form of a thesis (I had to explain what a thesis is) at the University of Alberta, and possibly a short article or two. Insofar as I could predict, these reports would be read by my committee and literacy teachers. The consent of each participant was given orally, but I think they were fully informed and later remarks verified this. One example was the participant's comment, while handing me a piece of writing, "Too bad more people aren't going to read your paper, then they could read this."

Having explained their rights as honestly and fully as I could, I moved on to the issue of confidentiality. This seemed to be more of a concern to me than to the participants themselves, and three of the four gave me the impression that they thought I was overdoing the "privacy bit." Two said they didn't care if their names were used, though one preferred to be anonymous. When I told the

fourth that she would be identified at all times by a code such as "A" or "B", she retorted with a laugh, "Don't you call me a B_____!" I chose pseudonyms eventually because they seemed the least distracting designation. I stressed that only I would know their names, that the information would all be confidential except what they approved for the reports, and that tapes, notes and documents would be kept in my study at home and in a locked filing cabinet in the classroom. We did not tell other class members about the study, interviews were all held privately, and because I kept a teaching log of each class session my note-taking was never remarked by other students.

I remained throughout the study the only one of us who seemed particularly concerned about the right to privacy, and feedback from the participants made me feel I was mystifying this aspect. A typical response, for instance, occurred when I intended to reassure a participant at the end of an interview that the names of people she had referred to would be removed in the transcript. "Oh, for heaven's sake!" she replied. "I don't care!"

I did not have to face the decision of what to do if a participant wished to veto some of the information: would confidentiality or accuracy of the study take priority? Nobody wished to withdraw a comment or an interpretation.

I was also concerned about my responsibility to the participants. Observation, even if buried in classroom

activities, might alter their actions and their learning, and the interviews would take time. As I have said, all were more than willing to spend the time, and all seemed totally to forget I was observing. They gave me copies of everything they wrote without being reminded, and three of them showed little reluctance to hand over uncorrected versions. I naturally saw everyone's uncorrected copies so I could assist them as a teacher, and this may have had something to do with their lack of embarrassment about unedited writing.

Personal problems inevitably arose as part of the interview and document data, but I was careful to refrain from offering opinions or advice. I felt that contributing to the participants' notions of themselves as self-directing adults (Hammond, 1989, p. 115) was important, so valued their input and comments. And, as already mentioned, their input led to a change in the study focus. The final responsibility is to share the results in a way that might improve educational practice.

Through attending to these concerns I have done all I could to ensure that the inevitable effects on the lives of the participants (van Manen, 1984, p. 45) will be more positive than negative.

Reporting Style

Reporting style in qualitative research is just beginning to be discussed. There is probably little

disagreement with Owens' (1982) observation that "a distinctive characteristic of the naturalistic report is that it is usually written in ordinary language" (p. 16) and that it includes lively thick description (p. 17). Eisner (1988) explores the question of language further when he says that "we (researchers) write and talk in a voice void of any hint that there is a personal self behind the words we utter" (p. 18). If an interpretive study is concerned with human meaning and is influenced by the researcher herself, then the language used to report the study should reflect its orientation. I have accordingly chosen to use the first person where possible, and to subjectify in most sections of the report. My selection of terms such as "participant" and "data generation" is also an attempt to use language congruent with the paradigm.

I have, further, followed van Manen's (1984) advice to "organize one's writing in a manner that is related to the essential structure of the phenomenon itself" (p. 66). Hence the arrangement of Chapters 5, 6 and 7 into theme statements.

Summary Statement

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology of the study. I explained the philosophical basis of interpretive inquiry and my reasons for choosing the qualitative paradigm. I then described how I made contact with and selected the four participants. Data was generated through interviews,

participant observation and personal documents as the participants and I worked together for a minimum of 12 weeks. To verify this data I kept journal observations and used credibility and member checks. Next I spelled out the data interpretation procedures and the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness, and concluded by discussing researcher effect, ethical concerns and reporting style. Chapter 4 will introduce the setting of the study and the four learners who shared their experiences and stories.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY

Introduction

Two vital elements of the context of this study are the literacy program and the participants themselves. The setting and the methodology the learners experienced as they developed writing skills are bound to have affected their attitudes to both learning to write and the impact of writing. The experiences and attitudes they brought with them inevitably influenced all areas of the investigation.

The P.A.L.S. Program

P.A.L.S., an acronym for Principle of the Alphabet Literacy System, is an interactive literacy program, developed by Dr. John Henry Martin and IBM, which uses microcomputers and videodisc technology to teach reading and writing to adults and adolescents whose entry reading level is below grade 6. Each classroom (or lab, in the IBM jargon) for 16 students contains eight personal computers and four IBM InfoWindow systems with videodisc players, placed side-by-side around the walls of the room. Every effort is made for the room to look unlike a traditional classroom. Students can use the InfoWindow computers by simply touching the screens in response to visual directional symbols or audio commands. The videodiscs offer rapid response time and television-like image and audio quality. A lending library, two work tables and a

typewriter completed this particular room, which was situated in a converted science lab in a high school. Fortunately the room was on the second floor of a back wing of the school, with its own entrance next to an adjoining community centre. The P.A.L.S. room was walled off from the rest of the school, and adult classes were held after school hours. This combination of factors gave privacy of access to the adults.

The program is designed to offer approximately 100 hours of instruction in English phonemes (Phase I), touch typing (Phase II) and experience-based process writing (Phase III). In our case, the 100 hours consisted of two-hour classes, four days a week, for 12 1/2 weeks. During the first half of the program the students divide their time equally between reading and keyboard skills. They work in pairs at the InfoWindow, learning the relationships between sounds and letters and letters and words. Individually they use the personal computers to practise touch typing so that they will be able to type their stories during the writing phase. Learner control and independence from the teacher-as-expert are guiding principles of P.A.L.S. although it is up to each instructor to put these principles into practice.

Other guiding principles of the program reflect current adult literacy pedagogy: the P.A.L.S. lab is intended to be a welcoming, relatively informal, non-threatening, low-stress environment which encourages self-expression. These

components of the psychosocial environment are heavily dependent on teacher personality. Completion and attendance rates of 80% indicate that students found the program to be a positive experience; a supervisor's report of the program spoke of "a caring, non-threatening atmosphere among people in the class" (W. R. Brown, personal communication, June 9, 1989); and students frequently said that they felt safe there, and their classmates were like a family.

Reading

The reading phase of P.A.L.S. concentrates almost exclusively on word attack skills, and takes on average 20-25 hours to complete. For approximately six hours, the students watch a cartoon presentation of a fable about two ancient kingdoms which reach the brink of war because of their inability to communicate. Six main characters in the fable introduce the sound-letter relationships, and these characters become tutors as the students move into the interactive part of Phase I. The members of each pair take turns writing in a work journal and typing the words, phrases and sentences spoken by the tutors. The system accepts both phonetic and "book look" spelling.

Comprehension is incidental to the program. A few comprehension activities are suggested in the teaching manual, chiefly asking what, who, why and how questions as the students watch the fable. Development of this reading skill is left entirely to the discretion and expertise of

the instructor; and given the restrictions of time (20-25 hours) and numbers (16 students per instructor with individualized instruction), comprehension usually receives short shrift in the reading phase of a P.A.L.S. program.

Touch Typing

The students spend half of each class session at the personal computers learning keyboard skills. A teaching program, "Touch Typing," was supplied and supplemented by a manual using a "linguistic approach" to typing. This meant the typing exercises, typed with an elementary word processing program called Primary Editor Plus, frequently consisted of word patterns. Students were encouraged to read aloud as they typed, in order to reinforce the connections between sounds, letters, and words. The personal computers were equipped with voice synthesizers and Primary Editor Plus contained an audio capability. Therefore the students could hear their typing exercises and their stories read aloud, albeit in an unnatural, uninflected voice. Although their progress is completely individualized, the habit of assisting a partner, which they learned at the InfoWindows, usually carried on at the word processors and was facilitated by the side-by-side placement of the computer desks.

Writing

When the students completed the reading phase, they switched to writing. Concurrently they continued to

practice touch typing. The minimal writing activities as outlined in the program are a biosketch (autobiographical story), personal data sheet, and resume. Supplementary activities such as letter writing can be added according to the students' goals and interests. The recommended stages in the writing process are prewriting, drafting, peer review, revising, editing and publishing--process writing, in other words. Within these parameters, the learners decide what they will write.

We diverged from the P.A.L.S. guidelines in two ways: I broadened the definition of the biosketch to include a wide range of personal topics, and replaced personal data sheets and resumes with other writing forms unless students had a definite need for a resume. In this way, students who did not wish to relive or share their personal histories had safer options to begin with, and more time was freed for students who wished to explore other types of writing. Letters were a favourite.

Most of their stories could be classified under the language experience rubric, although in a modified form because the students did their own scribing. The stories were narrative accounts of the learners' experiences and concerns which we used as the basis for learning text conventions. Dialogic interaction occurred in several ways: the students shared their writing with each other, both formally during peer reviews and informally at their

computers or around the writing table; I read and responded, pedagogically and personally, to each piece of writing; many of the written pieces, such as the letters, were written for a particular audience and most reached their audience; and at least one story from each participant was published in a magazine for new writers. My pedagogic responses took the form of informing the learners about such language conventions as paragraphing, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. All four participants moved into "organizational literacy" (Darville, 1987) when they wrote business letters, work memos or resumes.

With each piece of writing, the learners worked through several steps of the writing process. At the beginning of Phase III, I talked with the students in groups of two or four about the process approach. A large poster listing the steps hung permanently on the wall as a reminder. We then sat around a table to brainstorm topics for the biosketch. I served as secretary, recording suggestions in cluster form on a large sheet of paper in the centre of the table. See Figure 2, page 105, for a typical product of these prewriting sessions. Next I told the students that they could write about any topic this map suggested to them: they could choose to write one short piece on one subject, for example a hobby, or several short pieces on several aspects of their lives, or a long piece that included bits of every subject in the brainstorming cluster.

They were given three choices for drafting their stories: writing by hand, going immediately to the word processor, or telling their story into a tape recorder for later transcription at the computer. A private room was available for the taping, and earphones guaranteed privacy during transcription time. I also told them that they would be asked to share at least one piece of writing with at least one other student during the peer review, so they could write with their audience in mind if they wanted to. They were also given the unconditional right to refuse to share any piece of writing with anyone at all, including me. Two of the participants wrote all first drafts by hand, one used the computer for all stages of his writing, and one began drafting by hand but later moved to the word processor for both drafting and revising.

The language experience option of dictated stories was not given in the P.A.L.S. classroom, although three of the participants had experienced this with tutors. I encouraged them instead to use phonetic spelling, a planned outgrowth of the Phase I learning of phonemes. This is analogous to invented spelling, the technique preferred by Graves (1983, chap. 18) to the dictated stories of language experience.

Three of the participants typically began their first drafts at home or on the limited desk space beside their computers. Rarely did they use the more public writing table except for the less personal pieces such as resumes.

They were encouraged to make lists or story maps (clusters, which I had modeled) of their ideas before beginning to write text. The focus in the draft stage was on getting their ideas down.

Peer review conferences were held as soon as rough drafts were ready. The students had several options for sharing their work: they could read their own work aloud to the group, they could read each others' aloud, pass around the draft copies to be read silently, or I would read them aloud. Most elected to read their own. The responses to each work were guided by two simple questions: What did you like best about _____'s story? What is one change you would suggest? Often the suggested change was a request for more information, which appeared to raise the self-esteem of the writer: someone was interested enough in what I wrote to want to know more about me.

I encouraged peer assistance when possible, in order to decrease dependence on the teacher and to add to the learners' self-esteem as they were able to use their knowledge to help someone else. There was insufficient time to develop in the learners a very sophisticated understanding of what helps, but they soon developed a good sense of who might know what and would ask fellow students for vocabulary and spelling assistance in particular.

Peer conferences, then, took place in both formal sessions with me present, and informally as they wrote.

Although these sessions did not constitute genuine collaborative learning circles (Kazemek, 1988, p. 24), nevertheless they offered some of the same benefits.

To Graves the conference is "a simple, powerful interaction . . . (conferences are) intermittent meetings of child and teacher as a piece of writing develops in process" (Walshe, 1981, p. 11). I held many individual conferences with the learners as they worked through the writing process. Some were short and informal as I sat beside them at the computer and asked or answered a question, such as "Where will you begin writing?" or "How could you spell the sounds in that word?" Other conferences which focused on serious revising or editing were longer and more intense. My main purpose in the conferences was to teach through questions, following Graves' (1983) guidelines: follow the writer's information, deal with basic structures and process, and reveal development (p. 107). In other words, I served as the informant on text conventions.

I usually held two or three "official" revision conferences with each student for each piece of writing. In the first one we looked at the completeness and order of ideas. Sometimes we discussed paragraphing at this conference, sometimes in a subsequent conference, and sometimes not at all. Once the student was satisfied with his message, we held a second revision conference to look at, typically, sentence development. The students read

their stories aloud while I recorded punctuation and word changes that reflected the pauses and vocal inflections in their oral reading. I would introduce some guidelines, for instance defining a simple sentence, usually generalizing from their examples. Then, if the student seemed interested and able to handle more input, I would suggest a few variations of sentence structure and together we would select and underline a few additional appropriate places for the student to practise sentence development.

Vocabulary was usually handled ad hoc as requested by students. During the final conference we edited, paying attention to spelling and any other mechanics the students requested. Again, the teacher was to be the last resort for assistance. If a student desired traditional spelling (and most did), I showed them how to use the rather primitive spellcheck on the word processor, allowed them to use a dictionary in the classroom for the first time, and encouraged them to attempt the correct spelling on their own. Together we selected the misspelled words, and if students wanted me to, I underlined any that had been missed. If the spellcheck, dictionary or neighbour did not provide a spelling the student felt confident about, I would simply dictate the traditional version. Finally we set the printer to letter quality and published a completed copy.

The structure of P.A.L.S. was obviously more restricted than that of a more pure language experience or process

writing program, and because the students had to follow the P.A.L.S. program, modifications were necessary in the study's approach to writing. In addition, the introductory phonetic reading phase of the program will have influenced the learners' subsequent experience of writing. For instance, possibly the repeated insistence from both the computer tutors and from me that invented or phonetic spelling is desirable may have made it easier for these learners to start writing. On the other hand, the continual focus on spelling, of whatever kind, may have had a conversely negative effect by keeping the topic of spelling in the forefront of the learners' thoughts.

Personal Computers

Personal computers constituted a distinctive feature of the context of the study. Although there is fairly extensive research on the role of personal computers in the literacy learning of children, technology has been slow to arrive in the adult literacy classroom. Young and Irwin (1988) believe word processors have value in literacy programs because they offer ways to put current literacy theory into practice. The learners can use their background experiences to write their own stories immediately, concentrating on the thoughts because mechanical problems can be easily changed later (p. 640). The stories then become the reading text and the basis for special lessons based on the learners' needs. The stored text and the ease

of revising, and publishing, all facilitate processes of constructing meaning from the interactions of the learners' prior knowledge with the information and context of written material. They also use a holistic approach, combining composing and comprehending; and because the adults write their own stories, the process respects their backgrounds and interests (p. 649).

Other advantages ascribed to computers for adult literacy use are privacy, immediate feedback, individualization, control and flexibility (Turner, 1988, p. 643). Privacy is offered in two forms: adults still unwilling to disclose their literacy problem can tell people they are attending a computer course, and when they are working at a computer no casual observer can detect their literacy level (p. 644). P.A.L.S. students typically commented positively on these characteristics.

Computers also offer prompt feedback to learners whose typical classroom experience has been to wait for desperately needed assistance which rarely came (Turner, p. 644). This characteristic was true of the reading phase of P.A.L.S. and was probably responsible in part for the students' rapid acceptance of computers in general. Although it did not apply to the writing phase because that did not use a data base, nevertheless the speed of revising was an analogous factor.

Individualization, the third benefit, occurred in the P.A.L.S. lab in that learners could progress at their own speeds, at least in Phases II and III. Working in pairs during the reading component modified the individualization somewhat, but not having to keep up with a teacher or an entire class gave the adults considerable control.

Turner (1988) refers to Kozol and the theme of empowerment (p. 645), linking empowerment with the capacity computers offer for the learners, not the teacher, to be in charge of their own instruction. They do not have to wait for somebody else's permission to move on to the next step, and their interaction with the computer "changes the instruction process" (p. 645). This was true in all three phases of P.A.L.S., with the limitation of staying in step with a partner in the reading phase.

The final advantage, flexibility, referred to flexible hours of access to literacy learning, but because P.A.L.S. classes had set hours and were usually full, this benefit did not apply to the context of this study.

The Participants

The four participants fit the typical profile of an adult literacy learner. They reported previous feelings of shame about their inability to read and write and had developed a variety of coping skills, most commonly reliance on a family member or close friend. They had all been employed, but erratically and in jobs below their general

ability levels. All felt their illiteracy was a barrier to their life goals, and all had decided to come to a class only when several circumstantial and psychological conditions combined to provide the necessary impetus to overcome their fears.

Dorothy

Dorothy was my first participant, and we met as tutor and learner twice a week for three months before she began the P.A.L.S. course. In her early 40s, Dorothy's confident, sophisticated appearance belied her background of alcoholism, agoraphobia, and two abusive marriages. At the time we met she had not had a drink for several years, was in the process of divorcing her second husband, had been employed at the same kitchen job for almost two years, had just learned to drive and bought her first car, and had finally developed enough self-confidence to try once more to learn to read and write. A dedicatedly closet non-literate, "I hid behind looking attractive and looking as neat as I could," she would not seek help in her own community but chose instead to drive 70 kilometres to classes in order to maintain privacy.

Dorothy talked. And talked and talked and talked. One consequence of her shame about her illiteracy was that she had isolated herself from friendships, so she had many years of pent-up experiences to tell someone. During our tutoring sessions my biggest challenge was to keep Dorothy on task

and still allow her room to vent her feelings. Fortunately, when she discovered she could write she began to keep a personal journal which served the dual purpose of giving her an emotional outlet and providing us with textual material.

Dorothy grew up as the fourth child in a family of nine. When she was 12, her parents separated and her mother moved the children from the small Saskatchewan town where Dorothy had been born to a city. Dorothy's school attendance had always been erratic because of illness, and it deteriorated further because the family moved frequently within the city. She describes herself as a painfully shy child, and her parents' divorce was extremely difficult for her. She is still more fond of her father than her mother, both of whom currently live in Alberta. Her entire family is scattered now.

After the breakup of her first marriage, which left her on her own with a daughter to raise, she attended upgrading classes in her town. She reports that this was a demoralizing experience, that the students were not helped much and physical presence was all that was required. She then retreated into her house for seven years, her drinking and agoraphobic years. One positive activity during this period was that she began to teach herself to read by watching "Sesame Street."

A second marriage improved her life for a time, and she went out to work as an institutional housekeeper, eventually

becoming a supervisor. But poor literacy skills and increasing problems with her husband led her to leave this job. When the marriage ended she was determined to become independent this time. She summarized her past in a language experience story which we had worked with during early tutoring sessions: "You see, I have had to over come the pain of not having a loving family, and bad health (little Education), Mental abuse, from two marriages which had violent, rape, and divorce, and the last years fighting cancer and skin troubles. So you see I have over come out of it a mush strong woman." The skin cancer recurred during the time of the study, but Dorothy was so determined to complete P.A.L.S. that she postponed surgery for two months.

As if her life were not complicated enough at this time--single parenting, divorce proceedings, full-time job, driving a 140 kilometre round trip four times weekly in the Saskatchewan winter, and facing painful surgery--Dorothy also began an affair with a married man who had been her teenage boyfriend. At least this gave her a double motivation for making the trip from her home, and his encouragement supported her when she was tired or depressed. She persevered, improved three grade levels in reading ability, and wrote copiously. She also formed friendships (which continue) with two fellow women students. Dorothy says this is the first time in her life she has had female friends.

Roger

Roger was the only male participant in the study. He had just begun working with a tutor through the volunteer program when he also began P.A.L.S.. Our first two meetings were a small-group orientation session about the program, and a 1 1/2 hour one-to-one adminstration of the Woodcock Reading Inventory and personal interview. When I told him about my study, after our second meeting, he seemed interested and immediately agreed to be involved. He missed our first interview appointment, however, and I wondered if he would prefer not to be a participant. He insisted that he wanted to participate and displayed no further reluctance, either directly or indirectly.

Not very forthcoming about his early school experiences or family background, Roger was quite open about his literacy experiences and was enthusiastic about finally learning to read and write. I did not want to invade his privacy by insisting on more personal information than he freely volunteered, particulary when some inconsistencies in his off-the-cuff remarks over the duration of the course led me to suspect he was perhaps uncomfortable about parts of his past.

Roger, who was 25 years old and single, worked as a civilian employee of the Canadian Armed Forces. He had also been in the Reserves since his teens. His favorite topics of conversation were his work and the friends he had made

there, and his assignments as a photographer at work had given him a career goal--to become a military photographer. He implied that he had been practising photography for a number of years, but a few incidents indicated he may have exaggerated his experience.

As a student he was conscientious and reliable to a fault. When a work commitment meant that he would be out of town for two weeks, he began the course two weeks early rather than wait to see if he needed to make up time at the end. Roger claimed to have always been open about his literacy difficulties, and he labelled himself dyslexic. In subsequent conversations, however, he revealed that he had been bothered by being called stupid at school, and he had tried to hide his problem from his nephews when they wanted him to read stories to them or help them with homework.

Another major interest in his life was a seven year old boy with whom he spent a good deal of time, and whom he brought to his graduation dinner as his guest. Sometimes he referred to this boy as his illegitimate son, sometimes as his nephew, and he introduced him to one student as his "Little Brother." He was proud that he could tell the boy about the P.A.L.S. program and his reasons for taking it, and he talked about his anger when the boy would not do his homework: "There's no <u>way</u> I'm going to let him end up like me!"

Roger had grown up in the same city he lived in now, an adopted son in a large family. The anecdotes he wrote about his early childhood were amusing, and depicted a warm family life. Currently, though, he rarely saw his parents or siblings because most had moved away. He wrote letters to his parents and several sisters, nieces, and nephews during the course; but he did not mail them.

He offered the information that he had always found employment through his friends, but he never described any of the jobs he had held. At this time he had a job that he loved; but in order to keep it and to enter the military, he had to learn to read and write. His supervisors and colleagues knew he was not literate, and according to Roger they were very supportive of his decision to return to school. His general self-confidence had improved during the past year because he was successful in his work, which no doubt contributed to his decision to come back to school.

Roger frequently came directly to class from work, and therefore often wore his Reserves uniform. He was paired in Phase I with a Nicaraguan refugee who had left Nicaragua to avoid being drafted. (I didn't know this when the pairing took place.) In spite of their profound difference in values, Roger became very protective of his partner. He was also very helpful to other students, particularly when they had problems with the computers. Roger caught on to the word processing functions remarkably quickly. In fact, he

figured out parts of the word processing program before I did and was the only student (of 50) to begin writing on the computer before I introduced writing and word processing.

Edith

Edith, the oldest of the four participants, was raised on a Saskatchewan farm with one sister and two brothers. She left home at 16 to work in the city where she still lived. Now 59 and living on a disability pension, she was finally in a position to fulfil a long-time dream to learn to read and write. She had been divorced some years earlier, and her three children were grown and on their own. She saw one daughter and her two children regularly, but the son and his family live in Florida and she had not heard from her younger daughter for more than a year. After her divorce and the children's leaving home, Edith had applied for entry into an ABE program. She was not accepted and "quit trying."

Edith had worked for a number of years as a hospital housekeeper, for which she did not need literacy skills. Then she became ill, which resulted in several major surgeries and two years spent mostly in hospital. After her recovery, free of other commitments, she began at 58 to take classes in swimming, painting and sewing. Then she saw an ad on television for the tutoring program, and registered for that as well.

Edith did not drive but faithfully travelled by bus (involving transfers) and on foot to our tutoring sessions and to the P.A.L.S. classes. She turned up to every session, even when the wind chill factor created -65° temperatures. Her doggedness persists--on the day she wrote a Christmas card to me this year Saskatchewan was suffering another cold spell and Edith said she was the only student present in her ABE class.

Edith turned out to be my "negative case" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 139), though I did not initially anticipate or plan this. She had no employment goals for becoming literate, and she had no support from family or friends. She did not tell her daughter about the course, and the few friends she told tried to discourage her with comments such as, "Why bother at your age?" Although she appeared to have more social contacts than the other participants, and although she was one of the two who moved on to a traditional classroom program, she appeared totally uninterested in social interaction within the class. While not unfriendly, nor particularly shy, she did not enjoy working with her partner and was indifferent to sharing her story with others. She never spoke of literacy in terms of helping others, as the other three did, and when asked if she wished to contribute a story to a magazine for new writers, her prompt response was, "What do I get out of it?" Her life goals are also relatively unrealistic: she wants

to learn to play the guitar and become a singer and songwriter.

Our interviews were rather of the "pulling teeth" variety, unlike the easy dialogue with the others. She was not reluctant to speak, she simply had little to say on any one subject. Edith does have a mild hearing loss, which may account for some of her withdrawn social behavior.

Ann

Ann was the only participant to have grown up in another province. Although she was very willing to talk about her adult life (she is now in her late 30s), she was reluctant to speak of her childhood, except to say that she was one of seven children and lived in Nova Scotia. In fact, she cannot remember anything at all about her life between the ages of 7 and 15.

Like Dorothy, she has been an alcoholic. Whereas Dorothy credits religion with her recovery, Ann is deeply involved with Alcoholics Anonymous. Like both Dorothy and Edith, she is divorced and a single parent. In common with all three of her co-participants, she has an erratic but essentially successful employment history.

Ann presents herself as a well-dressed middle-class woman. As a result of participation in aerobics classes for 11 years she is very fit. Her current career goal is to become an aerobics instructor, but she could not read the instructor's course manual so she could not take the

required theory exam. After Ann was accepted for admission into a women's re-entry program, her employment counsellor suggested she upgrade her literacy skills while waiting for placement in that program. Ann was referred to P.A.L.S. as a result; and immediately after she finished it, she began to work with a volunteer tutor on the aerobics instructor's manual.

As far as she can remember, Ann left school after grade 4. In 1982 she attended upgrading classes at a community college, and in two years she completed the work for grades 1 through 10. Her achievement, especially since it occurred while she was still drinking, gave an enormous boost to her self-esteem: "I just felt that I had come so far in such a short time. I don't know if I had, as far as reading and writing or any of those things went, but within myself I felt like I had, and that was important." But then economic circumstances forced her to return to work: "It seemed like that always interrupted my education, going back to work. I tried to go back to school. I couldn't do it. It was just too much. So I dropped the schooling." She held a variety of sales clerk positions until she was laid off in the summer preceding the study.

The elder of Ann's two sons has been diagnosed as dyslexic, and Ann believes that she and two of her brothers (who, like her, left school early) share his disability. Her battle to ensure that her son receive the help he needs

within the public school system contributed to her own decision to continue her education. In part this was to provide a model for him. They are mutually supportive of each other's struggle to improve their literacy skills. After spending the summer on her first trip home to Nova Scotia and her family since she left as a young woman, Ann began the women's re-entry program in September.

Summary Statement

The context of the study--the literacy program and the participants--had both typical and unique features. The program was unusually short, concentrated and focused; and many current adult literacy principles were combined with a technological and highly structured component. Although the writing phase combined language experience and process approaches to writing, it also modified them. The participants, while typical of adult literacy learners, were unique in their life experiences and personality traits. Their interactions with fellow students, the program, and me were definitely context-specific.

BIO-SKETCH

Figure 2

Brainstorming: Clustering Sample

CHAPTER FIVE: PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING

Introduction

I began this study wanting to know how the participants' inability to write had affected their lives, what they perceived as important in the process of learning to write, and the nature of the impact of learning to write. The themes and categories which constitute the findings emerged quite clearly and strongly when I focused on the participants' words rather than on my preconceptions. One category was their conceptions of writing: what writing is, what and why they wanted to write, and how they felt about writing. A second category was their identities as writers: their self-concepts, the external influences on those self-concepts, and their writing behaviors. The third category, which included their metacognitive reflections on the internal and external factors that influenced the process of learning to write, aligned neatly with the related research question.

I had a problem, however, with presenting the first two categories, which did not align with my other two research questions. I could have "Before" and "After" chapters, and in each chapter present the data for each theme as it occurred when the learners talked about their pre-writing lives and their lives now. However, I felt that the themes would lose impact and clarity by being broken up, and that

the important sense of change as a gradual transition would be lost. Therefore, although the study questions are explored in the findings, I chose to structure the report to highlight the actual issues which emerged as most important to the participants. I believe the data is more accessible and more focused in this form.

The first category, the subject of this chapter, includes conceptions of what writing is, writing goals, and attitudes to writing.

What Writing Is

I gleaned the participants' definitions of writing from their responses to various questions about writing, in particular their discussions of writing goals, processes used while learning, and their choices about what to write. I never asked them to define writing, but their conversations were too rich in implicit definitions for this area to be ignored.

In the initial interviews, which focused on the participants' pre-writing lives, all four participants identified writing most often with functional tasks, which they usually talked about in terms of things they could not do or would like to be able to do. In the second round of interviews they spoke of writing much more frequently in terms of personal expression and emotional release--"getting the story out." During the program they all spent most of their time and energy on personal writing activities rather

than on functional ones. (It is possible, of course, that the focus of P.A.L.S. or teacher enthusiasm for their stories influenced their choice of activity.) Spelling was equated with writing, or was at least a major component, for Roger, Edith and Dorothy throughout the study, and writing also meant copying for both Dorothy and Edith. Only Roger said that reading was more important than writing, at least in the context of work.

Speed (time) and correctness were inextricably linked with the notion of writing: being able to write meant being able to "get it right" at the speed required by a particular situation.

Writing as Functional Tasks

If my question, "What was it like for you to be unable to write?" was responded to in terms of feelings only, I narrowed the focus by following up with "What were some things you could not do that you wished you were able to do?" This focus on inabilities has no doubt coloured the responses, but it was in this context that most of the functional notions of writing arose.

Work-related tasks were mentioned most frequently. Edith recalled no employment needs for writing skills, but Roger, Ann and Dorothy all talked about the difficulties of applying for jobs, and of doing well at a job, when they could not write. They saw filling out applications and preparing resumes as writing, but referred to them once each

and with no great passion. Ann's reply was typical: "The resume, ah, I knew I had to do it and that's why I did it. I don't know, it's just stuff that I've lived and it had to be on paper to look for a job."

Slightly more important to them were on-the-job tasks. For Roger, these were filling out forms and writing photo captions: "Most of the stuff at work is regular routine, the sheet that you have to fill out, work orders." He did not talk about the photo captions but he did bring approximately a dozen to class to edit and print on the computer. Ann also spoke of completing forms as a writing chore: "There was (pause) a lot of writing involved in the job that I worked there. Furniture, we had to order furniture, and all their book work." Dorothy mentioned frequently having to fill out government forms at her kitchen job. In addition she saw writing as typing menus and being able to take orders as a waitress: "I'd be typing. I'd be out front altogether." Taking messages was another task required at work.

There were only two <u>everyday tasks</u> that the participants classified as writing in their lives: cheques and business letters. Neither of these were raised by the participants except in response to a direct question from me. In other words, they did not seem to have much importance in their conceptions of writing. Edith did bring

two business letters to class for assistance, but never talked about the business letter as writing.

The apparent lack of interest or emotional involvement in functional writing might simply be explained by its very nature: "Because organizational literacy is not about personal experience, its users must not be caught up in the vortex of the immediate," Darville (1989, p. 31) said prescriptively. Perhaps the statement operates descriptively, also. The users of organizational literacy are not, or cannot, be caught up in immediacy--that is simply not the way organizational or functional literacy works. This makes it difficult to determine just how important functional writing tasks may actually be to learners.

The participants did, however, see writing as <u>necessary to further education</u>. Such tasks as note-taking and taking tests were volunteered as writing activities. Edith was taking three classes in addition to P.A.L.S., and she talked several times about "writing things down" in those classes. Ann and Roger had both had recent experience with note-taking for courses and exams, Ann through her department store job and her aerobics instructor's course and Roger with summer courses for the military. Their emotional involvement with these tasks was stronger than with the other functional tasks, as evidenced by their vocal emphasis when talking about these experiences. Dorothy did not refer

to a specific writing task in relation to education, but she used "education" synonymously with "writing" several times.

Writing as Personal Expression

It was only after they had experienced personal writing that the participants began to talk about writing in terms that indicated they equated it with personal expression. When asked about writing in general in the second interviews, they rarely referred any longer to the functional tasks, in spite of some questions specifically related to them.

The definition to which they gave the most weight through vocal emphasis, body language, facial expression, and repetition was getting it out. With no outside influence that I know of, and without hearing the phrase from me or anyone else in the program, all four participants and three members of the credibility check group used variations of that phrase. Their meanings included releasing feelings, articulating their experiences, naming their versions of reality, sharing their experiences, and making private information public.

Roger said that writing with phonetic spelling was "Great. Great. Cause I got a lot of feelings inside I want to get out, but you can't (pause) myself, I can't speak them. If I can write 'em down, it's out."

Ann also saw writing as a way to release feelings:

Fifteen years ago putting it on paper probably would

> have helped me a whole lot. If I could have put it on paper, I wouldn't have had so much anger inside. It's another way of getting it out. Even now, if I get myself totally wrapped up in something so I can't think straight, I just jot it on paper and it's gone.

Dorothy did not want to work any more with the life story she had written during our pre-P.A.L.S. tutoring time: "Then when I was going to rewrite that and correct it--the thing is, I got it out. Maybe that's part of your life that is over."

For Edith, though, getting it out had not meant a release of feelings. On the contrary the more she wrote, the more she found that "sometimes it bothers me, when I think of it, you know. 'Specially at nights. I don't know why, but mostly I think of it at nights. And then I cry and . . . (laughs nervously)."

A variation on the "getting it out" definition was telling their stories, not for their own emotional benefit, but <u>to share their experiences with others</u>. When I asked Edith why she continued to write her story after completing the program, she replied with uncharacteristic promptness and vigour, "I would like to get that story out." Roger described sitting around the mess hall swapping stories of military experiences: "I'd like to get it down on paper because I think I've lived a pretty interesting life." When Ann read her story of her son's learning disability to a

small group, it moved another student to write of a similar experience. And Dorothy also talked of sharing her story with other people.

The third association of writing with personal expression was the personal letter. I debated about classifying this as a functional task, but decided not to because the primary reason for wanting to write letters was a variation on telling their stories. The participants wanted to maintain relationships with family members and friends. All participants talked voluntarily of the personal letter as an influential form of writing in their lives, and both Roger and Ruth devoted time to writing personal letters during the program.

Throughout the writing-as-personal-expression theme the participants spoke in terms that corresponded with Darville (1989): "In the telling of stories, people relate to one another through a shared orientation to experience and their understandings of experience. The story carries experience into a relation" (p. 29).

Other Concepts of Writing

"Spelling" was probably the most repeated noun in the interviews. At times some participants even used it as a synonym for "writing." Although quantitative factors need not be valued in a qualitative study, it seemed that this notion of writing deserved mention simply on the basis of how many times it arose. Edith and Dorothy laboured over

spelling during the writing process. Roger and Ann had made conscious decisions not to worry about traditional spelling, but they still raised it several times in the interviews as an issue to be equated with writing. Writing is spelling, it seems.

When I asked Dorothy, for instance, whether learning to read or write was more important for her, her response linked the two in a typical manner: "Learning how to write. Just to learn how to spell." Dorothy had understood and independently applied the principles of sentence and paragraph development, but she never mentioned these as part of writing. Just spelling. Edith, even after achieving her short-term writing goals, still did not "like writing them (words) down if I don't know how to spell them." In spite of continual promotion of phonetic spelling by the computer tutors and me, and despite her own apparently satisfying experience of using phonetic spelling to get her story on paper, Edith did not change her perception of writing as spelling.

Although editing spelling took relatively little time in the writing process, and at least equal time was spent with other mechanical issues such as punctuation and grammar, the latter two were not mentioned as "writing." The notion of correctness certainly came up, but when I explored this it always seemed to mean correct spelling. These findings concur partially with those of other

researchers. In an American study, Lytle, Marmor and Penner (1986) found that "with regard to writing, low literate adults are inclined to think of writing as a technical activity in which spelling and punctuation are dominant" (in Fagan, 1988a, p. 48). In his Alberta study with 52 adults, Fagan found that "about one-half of each group believed that a good writer must be a good speller" (p. 53). Forester (1988), in her work with one British Columbia literacy learner, found that "as she started, she faced the problem of spelling . . . . The conviction that only accurate spelling would do kept her from attempting to improvise" (p. 605). Osmond (1986), in Australia, notes a similar concern with spelling: "The request from students in Adult Literacy programs for help with spelling--nothing else, just spelling--is one which . . . brings conflicting ideals tugging at the professional consciences of adult literacy workers" (p. 34).

Copying was another implicit definition of writing. When we first met, Edith told me that two of her goals were to write songs and recipes. I assumed she meant by "write" what I would mean: create-and-write-down. She didn't. She brought with her the songs, poems and recipes she wanted to "write" and copied them, first by hand and later on the computer. Dorothy also typed a published magazine article on the computer and spoke of the act as "when I wrote 'Betrayal.'"

The participants' concepts of time in relation to writing surprised me. References to time occurred in two contexts. Ann repeatedly referred to writing as "It's like you're slowing down, you're taking the time," and "It slows down your head." Writing, when it slowed down her thoughts, was linked with cognition.

The more common association of time with writing was speed. Both Dorothy and Roger spoke of their inability to write in terms of not having enough time. In Roger's words, "I just didn't have the time with my writing ability back then. It would have been gibberish. It would all have been gibberish." Dorothy expanded that theme: "If I had all day. Speed's got a lot to do with it. Like I know how to spell 'apple,' but to put it on that paper they've got sitting there. . . ." Edith also equated writing with being able to take notes "fast enough". Some P.A.L.S. students took 10 weeks to write one short paragraph, word by painful word. We considered that writing. My co-participants in this study did not.

Above all, the diverse meanings that writing held for the participants supports the view found in the literature that literacy consists of many skills.

Motivations for Writing

I asked the participants about their writing goals twice: early in the first interview and toward the end of the second interview. In the second interviews, Ann and

Dorothy both spoke of the functional goal of being able to write in order to carry on their education; but otherwise all functional goals were raised by the participants only during the initial interviews, before they had experienced writing. Conversely, goals connected to personal expression were referred to once each by the participants in the first interviews but the second interviews contained many statements about personal motivations for writing. Mountainbird's (1989) study with E.S.L. students discovered the same trend: "External utilitarian motivations seemed to be primary initially. Internal motivations such as expression of feelings, joy in self-expression, and expansion of cognition surfaced as the semester progressed" (p. 3595A).

The themes of this section roughly parallel those of the previous section because the definitions came mostly from conversation about goals.

Functional Goals

Roger, Ann and Dorothy had work-related goals. They believed that if they could write better, their work would improve and they would be able to get better jobs. Although filling out job application forms and preparing resumes had been frustrating and impossible tasks for them in the past, and although half the writing phase of P.A.L.S. could be spent on these tasks, the participants did not want to do them. Ann and Dorothy both filled out forms and prepared

resumes, but with noticeable lack of enthusiasm. They were pleased to have the finished products, but they neither displayed nor expressed the enthusiasm or sense of accomplishment that accompanied their personal stories.

Roger spoke of filling out forms at work in terms of having to, not wanting to. To Dorothy, when I specifically asked about her writing goals for work, "it would be nice to be able to write all the stuff on the forms and the stuff they hand out to us." Ann had described the writing tasks she could not perform at her previous job, but she did not consider learning to do these tasks as writing goals for herself.

All three, however, saw writing as a key to finding better employment. Ann had the very specific aim of being able to write her instructor's exam so that she could teach aerobics. And she linked writing with her general goal of improving her education: "That's probably why I really want to go back to school and start. If I have to start right from the beginning again, that's what I want." Roger said he came to P.A.L.S. "because I'd like to join the regular Force, and they say I need to be able to read, to write, their entry exam." If Dorothy could read and write better:

> I would go for a supervisor . . . Cause there was lots of jobs. I knew I could do them, but because of my education I could never get them. That used to hurt lots. 'Cause you always get dumpy jobs, and then when

> they find out you don't have good education, they give you the more crappy jobs . . . I pray that I'll be able to get my education. It's really important to me, that then I might be able to get a better job than what I have now.

She also saw literacy as a ticket to financial independence: "I guess that's why I want my education, so I can make my own life without having to worry about a man."

Edith, who did not have or want to work again, had a number of writing goals relating to everyday tasks: "I don't know (pause). I'd like to be able to write a letter, or a cheque, too." She also wanted to learn to take notes in her painting and sewing classes, and to write business letters such as the two she brought to class for assistance. None of the other three participants mentioned these tasks in the context of wanting to learn how to perform them.

Personal Goals

All four participants wanted to tell their stories, for therapeutic reasons; to share their experiences; and to help others. Roger wanted to write his feelings because he couldn't speak them, and he declared emphatically that he was more interested in writing for this purpose than for any work-related reason.

Although Edith found writing her life history more upsetting than therapeutic, she nevertheless devoted almost all her writing time in the lab to her autobiography. When

I asked her directly if telling her memories seemed important to her, she replied laconically, "Yeah, it does," but she couldn't explain why.

Ann reported during our first interview:

> I used to think that I would like to write my life story on paper, but that was before I went into the AA program, because all my past bothered me so much--about all of my sisters and my father and my mother--everything bothered me. And I thought if I wrote it down, it would help clear my head.

She still wanted to tell parts of her story, but for different reasons now.

Although Dorothy had said that writing a life history before P.A.L.S. had given her a sense of closure about her past, she added toward the end of our second interview: "You know that first piece I did? There's lots of stuff like that I'd like to write, like about alcohol, or smoking, or . . . I'd like to write a documentary on my own life. I'd love to be able to put down all what's happened to me."

All felt they had <u>life experiences worth sharing</u>, though their motives for sharing them differed. Edith basically wanted to set the record straight, to vindicate herself and punish her mother for the unhappiness of her childhood. To get the story out was to reveal her truth:

> I would like to get that story out, and get, like, people to realize what was going on. You know, between

> my mother and me. What she did, and, cause a lot of people, they, like she had them wrapped around her little finger, eh? You know, they'd just--what she said was all right. They took her word for it, but they wouldn't even ask me, if it was true or not. They just took her word for it. I want them to know that the things she said wasn't, weren't true.

Roger's version was that he enjoyed his life, and therefore wished to record it:

> I would like to sit down and start writing up little short stories of all the little interesting things that happened in my military career, and put 'em in, just for keepsakes. I'd like to get it down on paper because I think I've lived a pretty interesting life.

Ann declared that the stories she wrote were "just for me;" but she implied another motivation, that of helping others, when she described the situation that led her to write about her son:

> Well, my son's learning disability . . . He had talked to me. He was starting to fool around in school and cause trouble in school, and he was telling me this. So I thought, 'Is he trying to tell me something? Is he asking for help and I'm not seeing it?' And that's what made me write it.

The writing clarified her son's problem for her so that she could give him the help he needed.

Dorothy wanted her story to help others:

> I think I'd try to write a story on my life, to help other women. And men. I know there are lots that, that--they're in the same boat as me. If I could publish a book, I think it would help so many other women that have been in the same situation as myself.

Boudrias (1989) had shared her feeling: "I am now writing a book about my experience so I can help open doors for others so they know there is help out there for them" (p. 72).

Self-esteem and esteem of others were mentioned as minor motivations: "I'd love to make my daughter proud of me. I'd love to make myself proud of me."

Being able to write personal letters was an important goal also. Dorothy had first had a relationship with her current lover when she was in her teens, and when he went to jail at that time she wrote him a letter which he had kept. She wanted to be able to write to him again:

> I want so much to be able to write, so I could sit down and write what I feel, or write a letter to somebody I love, and tell him how I really feel. And right now I'd love to write a letter for _____. I'd love to be able to, find out all the information I could and just lay it in his lap and say, 'Here.'

Just as she began the writing phase of the course, her father had a stroke and was hospitalized in Edmonton. Dorothy spent almost two weeks writing him a two-page

letter. She wanted, also, to keep in touch with friends:

> And you, too, if you ever go away, Marg, I'd love to be able to write and keep in contact with you. And maybe even Ann. She seems to be one of the best pals (pause and laughter as Dorothy realizes she has made a pun) I've ever had . . . And some of the girls at work, when they go away on holidays and stuff like that, send postcards and stuff. It would be nice to be able to do that.

Roger never spoke about letters during our interviews except when I specifically asked him about them, but he began composing letters to friends and family almost as soon as he began typing and weeks before he "officially" began writing.

Edith, also, did not mention personal letters but she did write a letter to her sister in Calgary for the first time in several years and sent unsolicited letters to me, as have Ann and Dorothy.

Feelings About Writing

The participants' feelings about writing were as complex as their motivations for writing. When I sorted the data for this category, I created four envelopes: "Negative - Before," "Negative - After," Positive - Before," and "Positive - After." Only three envelopes contained data at the end of the sorting process; the "Negative - After" pouch was empty. This conflicts directly with Willinsky's (1987)

findings in his study with children: "In the attitude measures, the expressive-writing class's positive responses to the activity declined over the course of the year. . . " (p. 119). On the whole, the attitudes of the participants towards writing were similar to those of adult learners about literacy in general, as the latter have been reported by Boudrias (1988), Calamai (1987), Callwood (1990), Charnley and Jones (1979), Forester (1988), McBeth and Stollmeyer (1988), Norman and Malicky (1986), Parsons (1988), and Pillay (1986).

Negative Feelings

Frustration was a common feeling associated with writing, especially when the participants spoke of their past experiences. Roger's response to the question of what it was like not being able to write was succinct: "Frustrating. It was frustrating." Dorothy, when she had tried to write at first, found "I wanted to use bigger words, to make it sound right. To me, I got really frustrated . . . I just got really frustrated."

Edith told of throwing early writing efforts in the wastepaper basket, and added, "there was other things. Like, if I went someplace and I wanted to write down, you know, what it is. I wanted to write down, to know what it is, to remember what it is. I couldn't write it."

Shame and embarrassment were connected with being unable to perform utilitarian writing tasks in public, particularly when dependency on others was involved.

Edith had written letters at one period of her life, but she usually did not send them because "I knew they weren't right. And I didn't want people to read them."

When Dorothy went "banking, or applying for jobs, or stuff like that, I always took someone with me. Or I always had to ask them to help me. It was really embarrassing." She also avoided school functions or parties where she might have had to write something down, because "Everybody's looking at you, and I go, 'Oh, my God!'"

Ann used to write letters to her relatives, but their reactions to her mistakes shamed her. In addition:

> I just didn't want to even go look for a job because of filling out the forms, the application forms. There again, they asked you your name and this and that, but you just sit, and you take this piece of paper, and all you see is this information, all this writing, you know. Right away, I'd just walk out.

Roger had experienced discomfort at work: "It's a little embarrassing that you have to go there and, 'Did I say this right?' And it's something simple and it sort of makes you feel small."

Dorothy and Roger expressed more apprehension about trying to write than did Ann and Edith, but all mentioned or

displayed some trepidation. Roger articulated their feelings: "I wasn't really nervous about it, I was just more scared, until I realized (pause) like, maybe putting my thoughts down on paper, I thought it might be way out to lunch."

At the beginning of Phase III, all the participants, whether they would admit it or not, displayed behaviours which could be interpreted as hesitation. They tended to be more withdrawn and took a lot of time for pre-writing (and I could not tell if they were ruminating, practising, or just plain procrastinating) and needed far more encouragement than they had during the other two phases. Roger had certainly plunged into letter writing with no apparent qualms, but he took almost five sessions to really settle down to visible work on his biosketch. Once they had begun their drafts and received some feedback, they all became noticeably energized.

Darville (1989) may offer the key to this typical writing behaviour:

> As teachers well know, learners often hesitate before the written word. Their hesitation involves more than a simple lack of skill. It is particularly likely to appear when they encounter an unfamiliar form of literacy, and the skills they do have seem 'out of place.' Such a hesitation is commonly described as the

'embarrassment' of people who don't read and write well about admitting it. (p. 32)

Positive Feelings

The positive attitudes to writing emerged during the program. Even Edith, who never voluntarily expressed enthusiasm for anything, admitted that she enjoyed writing. When I pressed her to explain what she liked about it, she replied, "I don't know. Lots of things. Especially the words I know. When I write and I feel that I've written it right." But her actions displayed more enthusiasm than her words. She would spend the entire class session, day after day and week after week, on her autobiography unless I suggested she vary her activities with typing drills and supplemental reading activities. She was also most persistent in reminding me that she wanted her story published in the new writers' magazine: Did I still have the story? When was I going to send it in? When would the magazine be published? Where could she get a copy?

The other three put their positive feelings into words:

Roger: "I might not have thought about doing it. It just opened up a new keg of worms for me. It's fun."

Ann: "I like writing. It's important."

Dorothy: "Right from the beginning it was fun doing it."

Dorothy, Ann and Roger all ascribed transformational powers to the ability to write. One form of power they gave

to writing was if I had been able to write, my life would have been different.

For Ann, releasing her anger through writing might have saved her marriage and prevented her alcoholism. Later, when she did write, she described the process as an almost magical experience: "And I don't want to lose the special feeling I get when I write things on paper. It's almost like God's with me all the time. When it goes out on paper, it's almost like He's taking care of it now. And it's a real special feeling."

To Dorothy and Roger, writing probably referred to literacy in general when they said: "If I could write back, way back, my life could have been totally changed. What couldn't I have done?" and "I did things in my life, that if I'd have had an education I never would have done. I don't even think I'd have gotten married when I did."

Mountainbird (1989) found with her ESL students that "positive feelings energized and appeared related to an individual awareness of progress rather than an outside measure of proficiency" (p. 3595A). This was borne out by off-the-cuff remarks and actions of the four participants in this study. As they saw their ideas take shape, becoming sentences and paragraphs, with words spelled correctly that they could not even guess at only weeks previously, their pleasure and pride and enthusiasm grew. But although there was no outside measure of proficiency, the opinions of

others were influential. As classmates and family members responded favourably to the stories, the participants relaxed and wrote more and more vigorously.

Summary Statement

In the view of the participants, writing encompassed functional tasks, personal expression, and mechanical skills. Their motivations for writing were more functional at the beginning of the program, shifting to include goals of personal expression as they began to write. The feelings they associated with writing were negative at the start; but as they experienced some success in learning to write, they began to develop positive attitudes toward writing.

Empowerment for Doing

The study participants did imbue writing with many of the attributes of power. At the functional level they saw writing as a key to fuller participation in the literate society from which they had been excluded. It would enable them to get better jobs and to do their work more competently. Even to complete an everyday task such as writing a cheque or a business letter would increase their control over their lives. When they could write, other people would no longer belittle them or have to make allowances for them.

As they learned to write, they began to be empowered in that they developed and applied skills in using the written word. They became able to function more fully than before,

at work, in some everyday tasks, and in their personal lives.

There was no expressed connection of writing with political empowerment: they did not voice a desire to change the world, though they saw writing as a way to change themselves and their relationships with the world.

CHAPTER SIX: CHANGING SELF-CONCEPTS AS WRITERS

Introduction

The data contained a proliferation of statements which related to the participants' self-concepts as writers. They spoke and wrote of their perceived writing identity; about the external influences that had helped shape this identity, such as other people and previous schooling experiences; and about writing tasks that they could or could not perform. The self-concepts were generally negative when the participants talked about their pasts and positive when they discussed the present.

When the participants talked about themselves as writers prior to the study, they spoke of low self-esteem as both a cause and an effect of being unable to write, and of exclusion from society because so many forms of social participation required writing. They denied any writing identity--writing was something they could not or would not or did not do. In other words they described themselves as disempowered people. By the end of the program, however, they began to speak of themselves as self-confident people who could write and whose writing influenced others. They certainly did write profusely.

When Willinsky (1987) examined the self-concepts of grade 1 students in relation to learning to write, he started from the premise that in an expressive-writing

program "as the students realize a new written voice, they should discover a new sense of themselves as writers" (p. 116). He studied two classes, the second using a skill-sequenced program, and found that "in the assessment of self-concept, both groups made similar declarations of themselves as writers" (p. 119). He therefore questioned "whether writing out of oneself is a means of creating a self-concept of greater agency" (p. 120).

The transition from negative to positive attitudes which was clearly discernible in both the words and actions of the participants followed the pattern observed by Mountainbird (1989) in her study with advanced level ESL students: "Participants' descriptions of themselves as writers changed from incredulity, negativity and denial to a relatively positive and distinct sense of writing identity" (p. 3595A). We cannot be sure, however, except by reference to the criticisms of skill-based adult programs, if the participants in this study would have perceived equally positive changes in their self-concepts learning to write with another approach.

Self-Esteem

"I used to feel bad"

In the beginning, there were no words. At least, no words that the participants put on paper. As a result they did not see themselves as competent or empowered. Their illiteracy in general, as well as specifically their

inability to write, was often a cause of their feelings of failure, of being stupid. Writing seemed to have greater impact because it was more visible. If a person sits reading a book, an observer cannot tell if that person is actually reading or not. But if one puts a pen to paper, or sits at a computer keyboard, it is quickly obvious if that person cannot write.

Roger recalled being told:

> So many times, ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper, that I couldn't learn to read and write, that I was stupid, I was retarded. You hear that so often that you start--you don't want to believe it yourself, but yet you do. And deep down, you do . . . Half the problem is the self-confidence. I didn't have the self-confidence in the language department to read and write.

When Ann's letters to her family 17 years earlier met with criticism and ridicule, she eventually asked herself, "'Is it that bad that I'm being laughed at, or are they jealous because they can't do it? Or am I that bad?' (Laughs.) And I was that bad. The writing was that bad."

Edith reported that she "could never write anything down. You really feel awful. When I went someplace, if I wanted to write something down I couldn't write it. I felt bad about it."

Dorothy, too, talked about "what it's like to think everybody else is looking down on you or, you feel ashamed that someone else might find out that you don't have an education. Like I did all those years . . . you feel like you're useless." "Helpless" was another word she used to describe herself, adding that "I find it hard to believe that people love me, because of my education. I was always waiting to be put down."

They were trapped in a circle of cause and effect: when they couldn't write, other people made them feel ashamed and incompetent. So they stopped writing because they came to believe that they couldn't write and they certainly would not risk further public exposure and ridicule by trying.

"But now I feel good about myself"

As the program progressed, they began to speak of themselves as relatively self-confident people who could write. They also were able to differentiate among various components and types of writing, and were clear about which skills they had acquired and to what extent they had acquired them.

Roger referred to his new self-confidence several times during our second interview: "It comes back, it came back, to the self-confidence part. My self-confidence that 'I don't want to screw up! I don't want to screw up!' And now it's sort of like--I feel good about myself." In relation

to work, he describes this difference: "It's given me enough confidence at work down at the Armouries. Right now I'm doing filing, which as of two or three months ago I wouldn't have had enough courage to even attempt." He specifically credited writing, not reading, with the change: "Once I got going I realized I was not out to lunch. My words, spelling, that sort of thing, with the prewriting and that, things just started falling into place . . . I think I'm coming up quick. Cause I do got the brains."

Edith, who had been uncertain of her ability to write, did not consider herself a writer by the end of the program but she was much more confident: "Sometimes I wonder, I used to wonder, whether I would ever be able to do it . . . I didn't mind writing, but the words are, the words that I can't spell. I'm getting better at spelling the words, but I still need lots more practice." She added later in the second interview that what she liked best about writing was "lots of things . . . when I write I feel that I've written it right, and spell all the words right for a change."

Ann summarized the effects of having written and shared her story about her and her son's dyslexia: "At times I felt like I didn't belong or there was something different about me and _____. But not any more. We are both very happy people."

Dorothy's self-concept changed also. In the unsolicited tape, recorded approximately halfway through the

study, she said, "It's very hard right now, but I feel great about myself. I feel good about myself. I feel really good inside about myself." At the end of the program she considered herself, with qualifications, a writer: "I think I learned lots just going, like writing. Just learning how to make paragraphs. It makes you feel better in yourself." At the same time she still considered herself a poor speller: "I still want to be able to, if you give me a word, sit down and be able to write it. And just say, 'God, I did it!' It's not the way I want it yet."

Influence of Others

From reaction, dependency and isolation

Other people contributed both directly and indirectly to the feelings of failure and shame. Family members, unsurprisingly, often had the strongest influence. Dorothy, for instance, avoided school functions because she did not want to embarrass her daughter, although her daughter was in fact very understanding. Once when her husband's boss came to dinner he asked Dorothy to write down a mutual friend's address for him. Dorothy's husband was furious and "humiliated" when she could not do it.

Much earlier in her life she had learned to distrust family behavior when her mother had, at a teacher's request, tried to help her with her spelling. In a personal document she recalled:

> So Mom made me go up to the blackboard (that her Dad had made for the purpose) with chalk and made me do writing of words that I had no way of knowing. My Mom would tell me the word, then say to write it. And when I did it incorrect she would belt me over and over until I soon got it right. It may be years ago but to me it is as if it was yesterday. It's funny, but I can't forget it.

Ann explained, with tension in her face and voice, why she had stopped trying to write:

> I guess it was my Mom that kind of discouraged me against it because she started criticizing my letters, how they were written. And my husband's mother--she was very well educated and I used to write to her, to let her know how things were going. And she was saying, she kept bugging me about going back to school. And that, that discouraged me. I went the other way. I just stopped writing.

Her husband, she said, "used to get upset with me" and eventually chose to ignore the problem altogether.

In our interviews, Edith did not mention anyone in particular as having had a negative influence on her self-image as a writer; but one-and-a-half pages of her life history and several after-class conversations were devoted to anecdotes of her mother keeping her home from school on the pretext of needing help at home although she never gave

Edith any chores. She also wrote a detailed account of a school incident when she was blamed for something her brother had done, and her mother took the brother's side. After 50 years she still blames her long-deceased mother for her lack of education, and like Dorothy she still feels her anger and frustration as strongly as if the incidents had taken place yesterday.

Roger said that his family had accepted that he had dyslexia, but he felt distress when his nephews or "son" wanted help with their homework:

> You try to. You eventually run out of lies. Or you say 'I can't, I can't, I can't.' And then you try and tell them, 'I can't read or write' and they sort of look at you like, 'What are you--stupid?' And it hurts when you have to tell somebody, a little person, that you can't do it. Because they're always looking up at you, for the help, and find you can't. Like your glass tower just caved in for the little guy.

Colleagues at work also influenced the participants' self-concepts. To avoid negative attitudes Ann and Dorothy had usually tried to hide their lack of skills, though Ann reported her supervisor's offering to give her a required test orally. She kept her secret for a long time, though, by taking her paperwork home with her every night, spending hours to complete tasks that she knew other people could finish in minutes.

Some of Dorothy's co-workers had recently played a cruel trick on her when they suspected, but she would not confirm, her illiteracy. "When my boss found out I didn't have an education, like I told you he was really ignorant, and they put this board up with all the stuff (daily menu) scribbled backwards."

Dependency on others was another consequence of lack of writing skills that contributed to low self-esteem. Although family members and co-workers reinforced the participants' concepts of themselves as non-writers, they also were the people the participants needed to help them function in a literate society. For three of the participants, the person they depended upon most was a child. Edith's daughter wrote letters and cheques for her, and filled out forms for school. Ann's older son was her chief support though his literacy skills were not much better than hers, and Dorothy leaned heavily on her daughter.

Norman and Malicky (1986) reported that having to participate in a literate society "leads to dependency on others . . . this dependence, in turn, often leads to fear and frustration" (p. 13). My participants did not express unhappiness about their dependency, but the children themselves were not willing to be leaned on once they reached maturity and wanted independent lives. Roger asked colleagues for help at work, but he did not like to.

Perhaps the most damaging effect of illiteracy, particularly the inability to write, was social isolation.

Dorothy, because she couldn't write, isolated herself from social activities:

> So I'd always say no, I wouldn't go, and I'd make up excuses . . . Oh, I would go to some things I knew I was safe at, but I always let the other women do it. I really isolated myself from other people. It was like being in a shell looking out . . . Some days I was afraid to even go out of the house.

Edith had also spoken of feelings of isolation: "I felt I was left out of everything, you know."

Ann had cut herself from her in-laws:

> My husband's family never knew. They don't to this day know. They don't know about my education. They don't know much about me period. I guess it's because they've always acted--they always wanted me to be better than I was, and I just couldn't be bothered. Why should I be bothered wasting my time explaining? They don't want to understand it anyway, so why should I even try?

Ann also never told friends, and even "covered up" to her husband. Eventually this contributed to the breakup of her marriage: "I don't think he wanted to admit, to himself, that I had a problem. So I think he just kind of turned his back on it and went his own way."

Only Roger did not acknowledge experiences of isolation or covering up, saying instead, "I've always been open about my dyslexia. And it's--people, once they realize what it is, they seem to: 'If you need some help, come and talk to me.'" He contradicted himself somewhat, however, in his statement quoted earlier, "You eventually run out of lies," and when he reported feeling "small" when having to ask for assistance at work. He also said that he responded to his parents' request for letters with, "Because I don't have time. That's my usual excuse." Because his parents and most of his brothers and sisters had moved away, he was becoming cut off from them because he could not write.

To influence, interaction and independence

Happily, as the participants began to write the reactions of other people affected their views of themselves as writers in more positive ways. During the second interviews the participants spoke of changed relationships with others. They had become more open and found altered attitudes in family members and colleagues. They had even, to varying degrees, moved from being people whose fear of others' opinions had isolated them from social interaction to being people who actually influenced others.

Ann's self-esteem was given an enormous lift when her dyslexia story motivated a previously withdrawn and silent classmate to tell of a similar experience:

> That made me feel special. And I even found a real difference in her after she wrote. I thought she was relieved, and I thought, 'This girl has got (pause), she finally realized what I'm trying to say about writing.' She wrote her story on paper, and she was, you could see her eyes sparkling. It's like she was lifted, you know. And she felt better within herself, and just talking to her. I mean her face. Before her face was so tight. And it just loosened right up. That made me feel good inside.

She then transferred this belief to her second story:

I guess, too, in that story, I was kind of thinking of something like that. It's kind of simple and it happens all the time, but if somebody else reads it and they have something the same, let them put it on paper and let them show their feelings.

She also found her relationship with her older son improving. This was largely because she had returned to school rather than specifically because she was writing, but the story about their shared learning disability seemed to trigger communication between them:

> My one son (the other son lives with his father) seems to really look up to me moreso, because (pause) I think it's because he sees his Mom still fighting, still struggling. And he knows. He gets compliments from his friends about me, and I think that makes him proud.

I think it's quite neat, that they're noticing. And that makes me want to go on more.

Edith believed that when family and friends read her story, they would finally know the truth of her relationship with her mother. In other words, she too believed her writing could change others' thinking. She had not, however, become more open about her literacy skills, and had told no one she was taking a course, not even her supportive daughter: "She'll be surprised when she reads that. I didn't tell anybody that I was writing a story."

Roger did not view himself or his writing as influential, but he found a change in the attitude of his co-workers:

> They seem to respect me a little bit more, and they're giving me a little bit more responsibility and that. So they're not over, like when I'm doing paperwork and that, they're not over my shoulder looking at me. They're giving me the rope--if I want to screw up, I can screw up. But they're giving me the chance to prove, or to see how far I can go.

He also felt more confident when asking for help. What had previously made him feel "small," "now doesn't bother me. I try to decipher it as best I can, and if something's wrong and I can't make it out I'll go to the boss and say, 'This is as far as I got. Am I getting the gist of it?" He reported, too, in an off-the-cuff remark, that his boss had

posted his personal essay about combat nurses on the bulletin board at work.

Dorothy had previously gone to the greatest lengths of the four to hide her illiteracy, and when she developed enough self-confidence to tell others she marvelled at the responses. Her daughter's fiance, a university student, for example:

> I was afraid that--I didn't want him to know. And then, I don't know what happened, but I wanted to tell him about P.A.L.S., and that there's other people like me, like myself. And he's really supportive, like he really liked what I wrote to my Dad.

She proudly invited him to attend her graduation dinner.

At work, too, she found a marked change. A supervisor who had collaborated in the blackboard prank responded to Dorothy's telling her that P.A.L.S. was actually a literacy program by saying, "'Well, why didn't you just come to us and tell us?' Cause she said she's only got about a grade three." She also felt she received increased respect:

> One of the guys that I work with, his education's worse than mine. And he puts on a really tough front, like he's really smart and everything. But he's got more respect for me. And this other woman who used to give me a real bad time, she sticks up for me now. Like she gives him heck. So everybody's, everybody admires me.

In addition, Dorothy found that she had become a model for

others, that her actions could inspire change in people's lives. The wife of one of her co-workers, previously a closet non-literate, attended a later session of the literacy program. About the co-worker himself. she reported:

> He's totally changed since I've taken this course. He wants--he's selling his house now and he's doing stuff that he wants to do. He even wants to go back to school. Like it showed him you're never too old to do stuff. And he's gone back to church and everything.

These changes in the participants' attitudes were not totally accreditable to writing, but it seemed to be the writing which gave the participants the confidence to be open about their literacy problem, which in turn led to greater social interaction, increased independence, and a sense that they could influence other people.

Previous School Experience

The participants' early experiences in school had not been successful, and had left scars. Unhappy early contact with traditional education is often reported in adult literacy literature, as exemplified by Norman and Malicky's (1986) finding that adult literacy learners tend to blame themselves, the victims:

> Most of the adults in our study . . . reported that they had experienced difficulty in school. This difficulty was often acknowledged through special class

> placement or grade repetition . . . They mentioned personal, behavioral and attendance problems. Few blamed the school for their problems. (p. 13)

The other theme in the participants' recollections concurred with Fagan (1988a) when he reported that "the adults' memories for being taught to write tended to parallel their memories for the method for being taught to read in the sense that they remembered the focus being on letter formation" (p. 54).

Roger was placed in special classes, and says:

> I was basically ignored except for the last two years. Then I was in special education out at _____. We started working one-on-one. Then the year after that I went, I fell back to a routine. Like my Dad had an accident and I ended up taking over for him, and I had other things to do. It was too much.

The only thing he recalls about learning to write is being taught handwriting.

Ann left school in grade 4, and although she does not remember "what it was like in school, learning reading and writing" she did recall:

> I used to go see this woman across the street. She used to help me with my reading and my writing. There again, there was a lot of problems with my Mom and Dad . . . I remember the principal phoning my Mum and telling her that the only way that I'd ever be able to

> learn, she told her, is that if I experience life. That's the only way I'd be able to learn. They didn't understand learning disabilities then.

The neighbour who tutored her gave her some self-confidence, though, as Roger's teacher had done for him.

Dorothy's memories are similar to Roger's. She, too, recalls being placed in special classes and being ignored, eventually leaving school early:

> They had, you know, that class where they put you for slow learners, that kind of thing. We did that. That's as far as I got . . . because I, I was sick a lot. And then, my last report card, I was three months in hospital my last year, and I just couldn't see any sense to going back.

She also remembers writing as handwriting: "the teacher would put stuff up on the board and we would just copy it." But for her, too, one teacher stands out as a positive influence as she described in a personal document: "We got a new school in _____ so I got a new teacher that was so nice and so pleasant and so very agreeable in the way she would help me." Shortly after this her parents separated and she moved.

For Ann, Roger and Dorothy, family crises abruptly ended their single positive experiences with learning: contact with a teacher or other adult who gave them encouragement and individual help.

Throughout the descriptions of early school experiences are woven strands of self-blame: shyness, illness, learning disabilities and family problems. There is some resentment toward schools and teachers, but in this one area the participants differed strongly in their attitudes from the members of the credibility check group. The latter expressed at times vicious anger and resentment toward insensitive and cruel teachers and articulated little that could be categorized as blaming the victim.

All four participants had some experience with going to school as adults, and some of these experiences had been more positive than their early schooling. Although these later experiences did not seem to have altered their sense of their writing identities, they had contributed to a small, general improvement in self-esteem.

Edith had begun her sewing, painting, and swimming classes a few weeks prior to our meeting. She enjoyed the classes but was frustrated by her inability to take notes. Roger had been taking summer courses in the Reserves and had learned to admit that he had trouble reading and writing and would need extra help. His instructors had apparently encouraged him in his efforts. Ann's upgrading a few years earlier had been a very positive experience because she found that she could learn. Only Dorothy reported a negative experience with adult upgrading, calling it a

"total waste of time because they never taught you anything."

Writing Identity

In the first interviews the participants could think of very little involving writing that they could do. They did not view themselves as writers, no matter what definition of writing they used. Their statements about writing behavior consisted of "I didn't" or "I couldn't." During the second interviews, however, they all talked about writing tasks they could and did perform. The change from denial to seeing themselves as writers came from their own perceptions that they had set, and to some degree met, concrete goals. I cannot judge how much influence the language experience approach had on the transformations, although my preconceptions and biases make me want to agree with Darville (1989) when he says "The discourse about language experience conveys a sense of the transformative power of the act of writing. What is transformed is the writer's sense of himself as author" (p. 30).

<u>From Denial: "I couldn't write"</u>

Ann knew she could deal with some of her problems in the past if she could write them down, but "I couldn't, I couldn't. I'd sit down and try to write it, and how can you write it when you can't write? You know it's going to help you but you don't even know where to start." She also saw herself as a non-writer for functional purposes. When

applying for jobs, if she was handed an application form, "right away, I'd just walk out."

Edith, too, recalled not being able to write letters, make out cheques, copy recipes and songs, and take notes: "I couldn't write it." She said, too, that she had thought previously about writing her life history but "I was thinking, 'I don't know the words.'"

Roger used friends to find jobs because he couldn't apply in writing, and he did not write cheques or letters.

To Admission: "Now I can write"

During the program he wrote many letters, and he thought he would continue to write letters and stories because "it's a little bit easier to write them down." He was also using writing for functional tasks at work, preparing photo captions and:

> Right now, just setting up order forms. Where I can keep going through my checklist to order stuff in, going through the microfiche, 300 or 400 pages of it. Photography stuff which I have to try to decipher because the Army does not call it by its proper name.

The latter task required reading and writing, but although Roger had some self-confidence now as a writer, he "felt more frustrated sometimes just sitting down and reading, trying to read something . . . I haven't read anything out of a book yet." He could read his own text with ease but

thought he had not yet made the transfer. He saw ordering photography supplies as writing, not reading.

Edith, on the other hand, emphasized her improvement in reading, adding writing almost as an afterthought: "I can read better. I can read lots better, and I write better." She did not express major differences in her self-concept, but she was very aware of small improvements in some writing skills. Regarding note-taking she said, "I can do it a little better now, but some of the words I still can't write." But she did think her spelling was better: "I'm getting better at that, too. Some of them get written down the way they sound." She met several of her pre-course goals, including writing cheques: "A few of the numbers that I know. If I have to write a cheque I write $5.00 or $10.00. Something that I know. I haven't done any recipes for a while. I'm working on some songs, and I copied out some poems." No longer does her language reflect an "I can't" self-concept; instead she speaks in terms of choice and action.

Ann saw changes in relation to both functional tasks and personal expression. After she spoke of walking out on job application situations before the program, she continued, "But now I don't need to do that. I've filled out all kinds of them." She prepared a resume, too. She was able, also, to meet her goal of releasing her feelings and clarifying her thinking through writing: "Before I

would have sat there and stewed this around in my head and nothing would have come out of it. But I put it all on paper, and it was very clear to me what he (son) wanted."

Dorothy saw herself as capable now of performing some functional tasks. Now she can take orders as a waitress. But she, like Edith and Roger, has a realistic awareness of her limitations: "Writing down orders out front--that's easier, because now I know how to abbreviate them all. But if I ever went someplace where I had to write something down, I probably wouldn't do it. If I was writing it for myself, I'd know what I was putting down."

Writing Behavior

The participants began to act as writers and as participating members of society. The following data comes from observations, not from the participants' words, but I include it because it supports their declared feelings, and gives a fuller picture of the changes that took place.

Within the course, they wrote, illustrating Osmond's (1986) declaration that "those who become involved in real writing usually begin to write willingly and copiously once they feel free of the constraints of getting it right the first time" (p. 35). Roger wrote two different letters, the second twice as long as the first. Because he discovered the potential of the word processor he produced ten variations of these letters by changing the introductions and conclusions. He also wrote the photo captions, four

pages of early childhood anecdotes, and his personal essay about combat nurses. Ann wrote two personal narratives, a letter to me, and a detailed resume. In the class Edith worked on her personal history, revising and editing continuously; and she typed copies of two business letters she had written at home. Dorothy wrote the two-page letter to her father, her essay on feelings, several short letters to me, and a short resume.

Autonomy, self-direction

Another way in which Dorothy demonstrated her growth as a writer, even though she did not herself perceive it as a change in her writing identity, was her three-months-later reaction to her first story: "I made lots and lots of errors. I don't know, it seemed like--it hurt me to look at it, because there was lots, I made lots of errors." At the time we wrote the story, Dorothy could not see those errors. Now she could, though she was not impressed when I pointed this out. She also made decisions for herself at this time. When we first worked together I had to suggest every activity, but by the time we began writing in class Dorothy was very clear about what she wanted to write and how she wanted to write it. She used me for information about how language works, but her former dependency had gone.

Roger developed enough sense of his writing identity to stick to his guns about an editorial decision. Speaking of his last story, a personal essay, he said, "Now it's totally

finished. It's still got some of the parts in there--the one line might be a little bit too powerful. But as far as I'm concerned that's the way I feel, that's the way it's going to stay." He also began to develop a voice in his writing, with paragraphs in his autobiography such as:

> I have a philosophy that if you can't laugh at yourself, who can you laugh at? This is the reason why I wrote this autobiography. If you are laughing with me you are not laughing at me. If you do not have a sense of humour, STOP! reading this book.

Ann wrote one of her stories as if it were fiction. This could have been to distance the experience from herself so that her audience would not know it was true, but she said she thought it would sound better "as a story". She gave the characters abstract names--Poor and Little, used the third person, and wrote in a tight narrative structure with dialogue, description and action. Nobody taught her how to do this.

The participants showed little or no teacher dependency: they all made their own choices about what and how to write. They came to me for explanations about how to organize ideas into paragraphs, or how to punctuate or spell, but their behavior as writing students was otherwise self-directed. Similarly they made their own decisions about how much they had progressed. This contradicts the findings of other studies (Fagan, 1988a; Rigg & Kazemek,

1983), which may be a result of the approach used by the program or of teacher attitude.

Some of the participants' actions outside the classroom during and after the program spoke even more clearly of their growing independence as writers, learners and citizens.

Ann began writing letters to family and friends again, and was reading and writing at AA meetings for the first time. She decided for herself (as opposed to her EIC referral to the course) that she needed a tutor to help with her aerobics course, and she found herself one. She also made the decision to return to Nova Scotia to see her family for the first time since she had left home, and actually took the trip in the summer.

Roger volunteered to be the official photographer for his class's graduation and carried out a complicated ordering procedure which involved the creation of forms and writing down people's names and photo numbers. The orders were never filled, however, because he "didn't have time." Was Roger reverting to his old excuse? I'm not sure.

Edith wrote to her sister in Alberta for the first time in many years and finally moved from the house she had resented for years because of the maintenance, yardwork, and distance from town. She explored a number of options first, attending meetings about upcoming seniors' housing developments and reading advertisements. Finally she chose

a convenient, suitable apartment that she likes very much.

There is no way I can measure how influential writing may have been in her decision finally to take action, but writing was definitely an empowering factor in two other actions she took. She had worried for more than a year about her missing daughter, had phoned the police and the Salvation Army, but had not followed up when both told her she would have to come in and fill out forms. Now she picked up the forms, filled them in herself, and wrote the draft of a letter to the Calgary police. She wanted an editor to check them, but she initiated the writing tasks and carried them through herself. Another instance of acting on her rights as a citizen was writing a letter of consumer complaint to an appliance manufacturer. This, too, she did completely on her own except for editing assistance with the final draft. She has since gone on, at her own initiative, to an ABE program.

Dorothy has perhaps shown the least change in her behavior, although the cancer surgery and her long convalescence provided additional hurdles to overcome. She did insist that her doctor provide her with more complete information about her condition and the procedures than she had dared to ask for the first time, and because the doctor lived in another city she made her request in writing. She also decided to postpone the surgery in order to complete her literacy course. But she has not yet resumed her

education, and she is not even keeping her journal regularly any more. She has a more active social life now with her new women friends and is happier at work. She is presently, however, trying to decide whether to marry a new boyfriend. In other words, she may become dependent on a man again without first accomplishing her goals to acquire more education and be independent with a better job.

Summary Statement

Low self-esteem, a major component of the participants' negative concepts of themselves as writers, was both a cause and effect of their inability to write. The relationship between the two was compounded by the critical attitudes of other people and early experiences of failure in school. But as the learners began to write they felt increased self-confidence and found that the attitudes of others became much more positive and supportive. Finally, too, they were being successful in an educational setting.

Transformation as Empowerment

Writing was therefore integral to personal empowerment. The participants found that writing was a way to "get it out," or name their experience of the world, and they used writing to tell their stories. Some found a sense of community through dialogue when they saw how their writing could affect others. Above all they expressed a new sense of themselves as people who could act independently and interact with others in a positive way. They displayed some

characteristics of Norman and Malicky's (1986) completely empowered literacy learner: "a sense of self-fulfilment, a change in the way the adult views himself/herself and how he/she is viewed by others" (p. 15).

They changed, in other words, from viewing themselves as disempowered people who had poor self-images, who were isolated from most of society while dependent on at least one other, and who couldn't write, to relatively empowered people. They spoke of themselves as writers now; they reported feeling, and behaved with, increased self-worth and independence. They took action, not to change the world, but to change their worlds. They are just beginning to use writing to learn, now that they have discovered they can learn to write.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNING TO WRITE

Introduction

The participants' first requirement for learning was getting into a program. A number of psychological and situational factors had to fall into place before they took that first big step. The desire to learn to read and write was not sufficient by itself.

Edith had been unsuccessful in her first attempt to go back to school and she did not try again for years. This time she had no family responsibilities (which also meant no one at home for her to depend on for literacy tasks), did not have to work, and was in good health. She said, "I didn't know what to do with myself, and I heard about this reading at _____, so I thought I'd go and try it. Now I'm glad I did." In spite of lack of support from family or friends, her life circumstances coalesced with her writing goals to provide the impetus to start her literacy learning.

It was Roger who actually used the phrase "falling into place" to describe the necessary synchronization of several factors. In his case he had developed some self-confidence from his successful work experience, and he was encouraged by his superiors and colleagues at work--they even offered to juggle his hours to facilitate his attendance. He very much wanted to enter the regular Armed Forces so was strongly motivated to acquire literacy skills. "And now I

got no excuse. And I do have the time." In addition, the young boy he spent so much time with had become aware of Roger's inability to read and write, so Roger began to look for a program, and "then all of a sudden if you just start rolling on it, everything starts. I found everything starts falling into place again . . . It seems with this program, everything's just started falling into place at the proper times."

Ann had tried to continue her upgrading seven years earlier after she had to return to work: "I tried to go back to school. I couldn't do it, it was just too much." Now she was divorced, unemployed, successfully involved in AA, had a new career goal and a supportive son, and had further encouragement and practical assistance from a concerned EIC counsellor. She wrote in a personal document:

> You see, it seems to me I have a second chance at life. My first time around from the age of fourteen until I was thirty-eight I had made a real mess of my life. So I came to the end of that life . . . I am working towards school and learning what I missed out on so many years ago.

Dorothy, too, had waited a long time for the alignment of internal and external factors. Her daughter would leave home in a year, and because she worried about Dorothy's dependence she pushed her to find a tutor: "She says, 'You're capable of doing it, and you just need more

confidence.' She gets mad at me." Dorothy was also doing quite well in a secure job, had overcome her fear of leaving the house, and enjoyed the new freedom that driving a car had given her. She voiced a sense, not so much of things falling into place, but of everything happening simultaneously and almost overwhelmingly: "I have a hundred things happening to me all at once. I got this apartment, and _____ and I were separated. And then I got my new job, and then I got my licence. And getting you for a tutor. Everything . . . . (stops).

Once in the program, the participants discussed several factors which helped them learn to write this time around. Predominant among the psychological factors were strong, concrete motivations and some confidence in their ability to learn. Although they began the program with negative self-concepts as writers, they had tentatively positive concepts of themselves as learners. In addition, they all found and used processes which seemed to suit their learning styles. External influences such as the support of classmates and others, and access to tools such as word processors and easy-to-read dictionaries, also helped.

One final situational circumstance shared by the participants is that they were single. Roger always had been and the women were divorced.

Attitudes to Learning

The four main themes that emerged in relation to the participants' attitudes were a belief that they probably can learn; a willingness to take risks and make mistakes; a combination of perseverance and patience; and self-motivation, learning for themselves instead of to please others.

Belief in Ability to Learn

Edith had the least to say on this theme, but her "If I put my mind to it I can do it" was for her a very positive statement. She began the program with no real self-confidence, but she caught on to the reading and typing very quickly so that she had some faith in her learning capacity by the time we started writing.

Ann knew from her earlier upgrading that she could learn, and she had enjoyed that experience:

> I got such a high out of life when I was at community college, and I felt so good. When I was at community college I was still drinking, too, so as far as I'm concerned I learned a lot and it made me feel good. I just feel, if I did that good with drinking, look what I can do probably if I'm not drinking.

Roger also said, "I can do it" and "I do got the brains" when he talked about himself as a learner. His self-confidence shines through in one of his letters to a friend:

> The course I am trying to type this letter for is called PALS. It is supposed to help me read and write at least 2 grades higher or more. It has been only a month and a half. What an improvement, don't you think? I hope to be able to read your letter by myself.

Dorothy did not talk explicitly of belief in herself as a learner, although she made the greatest improvement of the four participants in terms of reading level and control of writing conventions. Instead she frequently criticized herself for progressing too slowly and blamed her chronic tiredness for this slowness.

One theme that I had trouble categorizing was the learning disability label that three of the participants applied to themselves to account for their literacy problems. I include it here because separating their selves and their general mental ability from their ability to read and write seemed, for Roger, Ann and Dorothy, an integral step in coming to a belief that they could learn.

I could not tell when Roger had begun to call himself dyslexic; but he talked about having been open about his dyslexia, not about his illiteracy <u>per se</u>. Ann, in trying to find solutions for her son's problems at school, finally had him assessed for learning disabilities. He was diagnosed as dyslexic. She decided that because their difficulties were similar, she was dyslexic also. The label

seemed somehow to be reassuring, as if "My problem is not me, it's a condition that I have" (my words). Dorothy looked for a tutor only after discovering that she was not alone: "I watched a lot of T.V., and they're more aware now of how many adults there are that have learning disabilities, reading, writing."

Perseverance and Patience

The participants had, to varying degrees, an attitude that combined determination with a realization that progress would occur slowly.

Roger was not worried that he could not yet read a book by the end of the program, and pleased as he was that "I got my feelings down on paper," he still acknowledged that "there's not knowing the full way to write a poem, or how to--because I might have said four words when I could put it into one. But that will come the more I write, get to know how to write stuff properly." His manner was very calm and positive when he spoke these words, and his behavior throughout the program reflected his determination and his willingness to take small steps.

Edith, too, displayed a dogged determination to carry on and seemed satisfied with each small improvement. When I asked her what, if anything, she found frustrating about writing, she replied, "I get mad at it sometimes and throw it away. I couldn't get the words right, or (pause). But I'd go back in a couple of days and try it again."

Ann realized also that it would take time to meet her goals, but she never showed or expressed any tendency to give up. At one point, talking about her plans to go into the women's re-entry program and carry on with her education, she said, "My reading was too low to go into the re-entry program . . . That's why I went through P.A.L.S. . . . if I have to start from the beginning again, that's what I want." She was willing to take whatever time was necessary to get her education.

Dorothy, on the other hand, was in a hurry, but she was aware of this: "I think sometimes I set my goals too high, my expectations for what's going to come out of it. I think I wanted it to be too fast." Writing to her father, she described her life at this time:

> You see, Dad, I have been getting up at 4 A.M. and going to work and after work, I drive up to _____ for my schooling, school is from 3 P.M. to 6 P.M.. And I go have supper and go back to _____. I do this 4 times a week. So after 10 days (her shift length) of working I'm so played out. Sometimes I go home and have a good old cry. I think it is old age. Ha, ha.

But in spite of, or perhaps carried along by the momentum of, the complicated demands of her life she would not slow down, saying, "you either just give in to it or you fight back." Dorothy fought back, but I'm not sure that she is still fighting.

Willingness to Take Risks

The participants also shared some degree of willingness to try different methods and to experience failure, and an attitude that it was all right to make mistakes.

Dorothy was less forgiving of herself than the others were of themselves. She appreciated the acceptance by her lover of the errors in her writing, but she couldn't accept them herself. "I think my biggest fear is failing, right now. There always seems to be so much going on in my life. And I'm trying hard to keep a level head about everything. And just to see what's going to happen with my life." Dorothy, also, was the least willing of the participants to try phonetic spelling, though she regretted this by the end of the course. She wrote a lot but she appeared to find the writing more stressful than her co-participants did.

Edith was willing to use whatever methods were suggested to her: "I'll try different ways," although she too found it hard to let go of her notion of correctness, of feeling pleased with writing only when all the words were spelled correctly. In one of her stories, though, she talked more tolerantly of making mistakes in life: "I know that I make mistakes but so do other people. I have made mistakes all my life and so have other people." This was the closest thing to a philosophical statement that I heard from Edith, and perhaps there was more transfer of this acceptance of mistakes to her learning than she was able to

articulate. Her behavior--writing and revising and writing some more, often with little feedback--displayed great patience and tenacity.

Roger was the most willing of the four to take chances and accept his limitations. When I asked if he had worried about his spelling he replied, "No, I didn't. When I want to put something on paper I don't worry about it word for word . . . Spelling is never going to be my best point . . . It's okay to make some mistakes." Did he know how he might handle writing blocks or periods of frustration? "I don't know. I'll wait till it comes and try it."

Ann also mentioned "not worrying about the spelling." Knowing her writing could be private gave her the security to try and to take chances:

> I think the big thing for me was don't try to get fancy, because you're the only one that's going to see it. Nobody else will see it or laugh at it, you know? And I had to convince myself that it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks any more. I worked my life for so many years around what everybody else was thinking, and look where it got me. And now I'm going to do it my way.

Self-motivation

Self-motivation, learning for themselves instead of to please others, was a key ingredient of the participants' attitudes as learners. Ann was going to learn her way, and

several times she said she wanted to learn to write "for myself." When others liked her writing, "that's okay. But I did this for me. I'm just doing it because I want to do it. And when they read it . . . . I just said, 'That's their choice. They don't have to finish it if they don't want to."

Roger cared about his audience, but from the point of view of expressing his ideas to them: "If I can get my thoughts down on a piece of paper, and you can be able to read it. Even knowing there's spelling mistakes--I can get my point across. That's all I care about. It's my point I want to get to you."

Edith also talked about learning to write in terms of getting her message across to others and for personal satisfaction: "I did it for myself." And to Dorothy it was important "to want to help yourself . . . God helps those who help themselves."

All four participants appreciated assistance from classmates, friends and family, tutors, and me, but none depended on it or waited for it. They all exhibited a considerable degree of autonomy as learners.

Learning Processes

When we talked about learning to write--what the participants perceived themselves to be doing and what they found helpful--they volunteered information about sources and development of ideas and about how they handled revising

and editing, specifically vocabulary and spelling choices. Although we spent considerable time in class and tutoring sessions on other changes such as ordering and developing ideas, structuring paragraphs and sentences, and on end and internal punctuation, and although the participants began to master some of these processes cognitively, they did not often filter through to the level of metacognition.

Sources of Ideas

By the time the four learners put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard, they had the ideas they wanted to write about. I could not tell how our brainstorming sessions influenced their choices. Nor could I determine if these participants, like the adults in Fagan's (1988a) study, "did not see preplanning as part of the writing act" (p. 51) because I told them it was and we acted on that premise before we talked about composing.

Dorothy's father's stroke meant they could no longer talk on the phone, so Dorothy was motivated to write him a letter about her activities for the past two months. In addition, her feelings were in a turmoil because so much had happened to her in the past year, and she wanted to reflect on these. Her life, in other words, provided her with plenty of material. The hours she spent driving gave her a quiet time to allow ideas to come: "When I was sitting in the car, then I'd get all these brainstorms." Some of the phrases she used in her essay, "Feelings," suggest she may

also have been influenced by popular ideas picked up from magazines or television talk shows.

Ann, too, had immediate concerns in her life to write about. After she finished her first story she paused before beginning a new one: "There was one day there when you asked me if I should start another story, and I just sat there, and I burned my brain trying to think of something to write about. And that piece of paper I did, I put it in the garbage. And then I thought, 'Well, it'll come to me when it's ready.'" Two days later she was writing her second story. At another time she described how she composed: "I just put down what's there in my head, I just put it down quickly."

Edith began her life history immediately in the writing phase, barely waiting till we had finished the prewriting session, and she continued to work on it throughout and after the program. She said, however, in relation to choosing a topic, "I don't mind being told what to do." She also said that she got ideas from "the books that I read, papers, magazines" but she did not actually use these ideas for writing. Did the prewriting session help? "Well, mostly I had my own ideas. But I suppose it helps you to talk about it." Her tone of voice was more polite than enthusiastic. Her story obsessed her, and in five months she never ran out of details to add.

Roger composed first drafts on the computer, because his handwriting was too slow to record the flow of ideas: "The ideas usually just come to me. Because if I sit down and try to get it down on paper, I seem to lose what I was (pause). Just get it down and go from there." He said he did not spend time thinking or making notes before writing. Instead "I usually start in," but he declared that pre-writing was "one of the things I've got to start thinking about." He described the composing process figuratively as "it's just like trying to paint, or start building a house. You start building something and all of a sudden you see an idea and you want to start putting it in. And it just keeps adding up." Observation revealed that all four participants tended to write this way--once they began, the ideas flowed.

Revising

I use the term revision to refer to the changing of first drafts in terms of the development and organization of ideas, paragraph and sentence structure, and meaning clarification through additions, deletions and word changes. Editing will refer to alterations in mechanics such as spelling and punctuation.

All four participants spent the major part of their writing time on revision, learning and applying the higher order writing processes listed above. My observation notes and the many drafts of their stories reveal this clearly. This is possibly because of the computer. According to

Morton, Lindsay and Roche (1989), word processors remove the tedium of adding, deleting and reordering: "the simplification of storing, editing and revising text leaves students free for higher order processing . . . (these) include planning, composing, and editing-revising" (p. 146).

They seemed, however, to have less metacognitive awareness of these processes than of choosing topics (or being chosen by topics) and of dealing with spelling. They volunteered no information about revising when we talked about writing in general. The writing itself had included so many changes, however, that revision seemed an important area. I therefore asked them specifically what they had done between the first drafts and the finished stories. Even then they were not very clear about how they had made changes.

Dorothy said she had altered, in her letter to her Dad, "a little bit in the wording, a couple of things. But the paragraphs I didn't change because after the first time we did a paragraph, it was just sort of (pause), it was okay." She was right, it was okay. She understood the basic concept of a paragraph as one main idea, and organized all her subsequent writing into coherent units. She wrote her "Feelings" quite slowly, planning ahead and revising as she composed. After she completed her first draft, "I added some, I didn't take anything out. I wanted to add more, but if I started changing it, I knew I would have had to go

right back, like how I did it from the beginning." All that rewriting was too onerous a task at this point.

Edith, too, added details rather than deleting as she revised. She also rearranged segments after we talked about paragraphing, although "I don't know if I got the paragraphs right or not." Edith said that making changes "was all right" but what she liked best was "the typing. Typing it on the computer." As she typed her handwritten first draft, however, she made revisions rather than copying verbatim.

Ann preferred handwriting to using the word processor, but she did enjoy the ease of revising on the computer. She described the composing and revising process as she experienced and perceived it:

> When I first wrote the story about the two little girls, I just wrote it down as it came to me in my head. And it was mixed up in the lines. As I went along, thoughts kept coming, and I knew the story was all mixed up and something should be in the first paragraph. And I'd write that, I'd put a number 1 beside the sentence that should be moved up later on. Then I'd go back and write everything out.

Roger had only one comment about the revision process. To check his sentence structure and punctuation he would "read it to myself and sometimes it doesn't seem right, so I start thinking about how, how does it sound? (I was) doing it that way."

Editing

The participants naturally needed and used help with editing, but they also developed techniques to assist themselves. Except for Ann, who could spell relatively well, editing for spelling became synonymous with learning to spell their words.

Roger began to recognize enough orthographic principles to enable him to tell which words were correct and which not, though phonics did not always help him: "I could see, I'd have it down, it looks right but yet it didn't. I know what I mean, but sounding them out, sometimes I'm sounding them wrong."

I had noticed that he seemed to remember how to spell a word once he had struggled to determine the correct spelling for himself, but he did not recall the words corrected for him by his tutor. When I asked him if my observation made sense to him, he replied:

> It depends on the word. Once I get using the words, over and over again, that's when it's going to start. If I keep getting it wrong then I have to sit down, getting the book out, start writing the words down. Practice, repetition makes it better.

Dorothy also found repetition useful in learning to spell. In order to learn to write menu items, "I would just keep writing it over and over. When _____ (waitress) was gone, I was out front and I could write out the words. But

you have to be doing it every day." She also tried to sound out the words, but felt "my phonics are still--I'm not grasping it right or something." She had previously used the trick of "looking all the time for these little words inside of big words" when reading, and she transferred this technique to writing. She described another way she used the familiar to help with the unfamiliar: "Sutherland used to be our doctor at the farm. I would never have known how to spell that. And when I looked at it I thought, 'if I put that R there it would be Ruth-er-land."

Edith had nothing to say about editing processes. She learned to use commas and periods quite quickly after an explanation of their purposes and a couple of practice sessions with me and also learned the basic purpose of paragraphing.

Ann's only editing-related observation came in her conversation about why she preferred scribing by hand to typing: "For me, it was better to sit down and do it and see, see where I was supposed to put the periods in."

Even though they used phonetic spelling for rough drafts, internalized a number of spelling principles, and could use a dictionary or the computer spellcheck, the strength of their feelings about correct spelling restricted vocabulary choices for Edith and Dorothy. When Edith came to a word she could not spell, and no help was available, "I

leave it out." Dorothy "wanted to use bigger words, to make it sound right."

The participants did make major strides towards becoming writers, in spite of experiencing the situation presented by Osmond (1986):

> We have in fact changed many of the rules--not just those which relate to the place of conventional spelling and punctuation . . . It is no wonder that it takes adult students some time to re-learn the rules of the game, before they feel free to really begin to read and write--to become really literate. (p. 36)

Their progress confirms Forester's (1988) experience:

> My observations of the benefits children derived from shifting to Graves's Writers' Workshop (1983) suggested that work on independent writing and invented spelling might move Laura to the internalization of the rules of spelling and writing . . . Practice over a number of months brought remarkable progress. Laura's writing evolved from a few words to pages of letters and descriptions. (p. 605)

External Factors

External factors which the participants felt contributed to learning to write fell into two categories: tools, such as dictionaries and the computer, and people such as the teacher, tutors and classmates.

Tools

Roger loved using the computer from the first day when he began typing, and he used the word processing program capabilities more than any other student, particularly to revise and edit. Frequently he turned to the rather unwieldy spellcheck for help: "Some of the words which I knew I spelled, which were wrong, you'd hit the computer and it'll help you." He often worked at training camps on weekends, and to help himself write on these occasions he bought himself a computerized spelling helper: "If you're out in Booneyville with it, it'll tell you and then all you have to do is sit down and try and figure it out, saying the word."

If these tools did not provide the information he needed, "I look in my dictionary. If I can't find it in the dictionary, I'll ask somebody. My tutor helps sometimes, too." Roger also found another tool to help him add to the pool of words he could spell: "I'm getting those books on Word Finds and reading them. Usually they have a--each puzzle has a theme. You start saying them. I'm looking for the word, I'm saying it and I'm spelling it at the same time."

Edith reported that "mostly I used the dictionary and the computer." She used the dictionary "to get some of the words right. You know, the spelling. And that helped quite a bit." The computer she liked because of "the idea of

printing it, and making the changes, and seeing it printed--proper."

Dorothy was as enamored of the computer as Roger was. Her voice grew animated and louder as she said, "Like, just learning the different keys. I'd love to go out and buy one. Oh, they just fascinate me. They're just great. I think that, that it's just a fantastic tool . . . when it talks to you, and you can hear it, your own mistakes and stuff." She also found that "it's fascinating when you think of how that thing can change paragraphs." Dorothy continued, also, to use a dictionary because "that's the way I've always done it."

Ann was the least tool-dependent of the participants, and the only one who claimed not to enjoy the computer: "For me, I'd rather do it without the computer. It's faster for somebody that's in the business and wants to--doing it for their work." But Ann was not in a hurry. Writing provided her with a way to slow down her thoughts, not accelerate them. She also rarely used a dictionary for assistance.

People

Other people offered encouragement, information and help; gave a sense of being accepted; and provided an audience for the writing. Just as the role of others had been significant in contributing to the participants' low self-esteem and to their feelings of accomplishment as they

began to write, so the helping role of others during the learning process was significant. The important people at this time were the teacher and tutors, classmates, and assorted family members, friends and co-workers. The participants emphasized that help was not in the form of specific assistance with writing processes, but of attitudes of encouragement and acceptance.

Dorothy spoke most of the importance of other people in her learning to write, singling out her daughter, her lover, me and her fellow students. From me and her lover she appreciated: "You make me feel strong in myself, and he makes me feel like that . . . like, there's nothing you can't do if you just put your mind to it. You make a person feel good about themselves." Her lover also was "really proud that I'm doing this class and that I'm trying to, you know, further and better myself."

Her fellow students helped Dorothy overcome her feelings of isolation, and she relied on them for help also:

> I always relied on other people. It's just the support from somebody else who's in the same boat as you. I think it makes the other person feel good, too . . . I'm going to miss being in the group. It gives you a sense of family when you're in the group.

Dorothy's daughter had always been encouraging, but now she actively pushed Dorothy to learn so that by the time she left home her mother would be more independent. She was

beginning to express impatience with Dorothy's reliance on her "and I think that's her way of telling me, 'Do it yourself.' In a way it's good because then I know I have to. She says, 'You're capable of doing it, and you just need more confidence.' And she gets mad at me."

Edith came to me fairly often for help. She learned not to depend on me for correct answers but instead for indicating why and how various conventions worked. She thought she could not carry on independently after I left: "I think I would like to have a tutor." She decided to enrol in a class instead, but even there she continued to write with relative independence: "He (the teacher) helps me quite a bit now. But he doesn't have to tell me too many words." As I have already said, she did not have encouragement from family or friends, and appeared disinterested in her classmates.

Ann's main support, she felt, came from her son: "He knows what a struggle it is to learn, and he knows about me going back to P.A.L.S. and he remembers me going to community college . . . and he knows that education is just so important." She was not as sentimental (Dorothy's word) about her relationship with me or her fellow students as Dorothy was, and she wanted information from me more than moral support. She worked well with the students near her, and became friends with Dorothy. They assisted and encouraged each other regularly. In a casual conversation

following an evaluation of the program, she praised "the feeling in the class and from the teacher," but she did not tell me in our interviews.

Roger was most appreciative of the attitude of his work colleagues:

> They know what I'm doing. They're giving me the credit, saying, 'You might say he has a learning difficulty. He's going after it. He's trying to correct it.' And these guys say, 'Good. I like it.' And they give me the input, which I needed.

Other people also constituted an audience for the participants' writing, which seemed to be important to them. Edith hoped that "once it gets published it might get to--some people that see it might read it and give it to somebody else. Pass it around, I hope." Roger also wanted an audience, and took his finished stories to work. Ann, as already explained, had discovered the power of audience reaction to her writing. Dorothy, too, was pleased when her lover, in particular, read her work. She wanted an audience, but it had to be "someone that was pleasant, that wasn't going to be putting me down. Someone that keeps encouraging you."

Summary Statement

The participants found different factors helpful in the process of learning to write. Their writing evidenced more

cognitive growth, however, than the interviews revealed of their metacognitive awareness of that growth.

For the most part they required information about how to write, encouragement that their ideas and language were acceptable, and access to tools such as a word processor or dictionary. The more they internalized language conventions, the more they wrote and the better they felt about it.

Psychological factors seemed to be most significant to the participants: their belief in their ability to learn, their willingness to try, tolerance of errors and slow progress, and self-motivation. The psychological effects of being with other supportive learners and of having a safe audience for their writing also contributed to the learning.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Study

Purpose

My practical experience as a teacher and adult literacy tutor developed my interest in adult literacy theory. When I reviewed the current literature in the field I found, together with the notion that literacy consists of diverse skills, many recommendations that expressive writing is a major ingredient of literacy programs, because non-literates lack power in their own lives and in our literate society. Writing is believed to be empowering because it consists of visible skills and it gives learners a voice. I also found espousal of the belief that learners' views should be taken into account in designing literacy programs, and research into their feelings about literacy in general. I did not find, however, research into adult literacy learners' attitudes toward writing. How did they perceive writing? Was it as important and/or empowering as the theoreticians suggested?

I focused on three questions for my research. What had the learners' lives as non-writers been like? What changes did they perceive as they learned to write? What factors were influential in learning to write? The next step was to decide which research methods were best suited to generating answers to my questions.

Methodology

Because I wanted to understand the subjective meanings that writing had for adult literacy learners, I elected to use interpretive inquiry. In order to give my participants fair return for their input, and in order to be as closely involved with their learning process as possible, I chose also to teach the participants myself.

I conducted two unstructured interviews with each of the four purposively selected participants, all in the same literacy program, over a period that varied from three to five months. In addition, I kept observation notes during the three months of the program, and had access to many personal documents. Confirmation of the data came from a focused interview with a group of eight other literacy learners.

I transcribed the interview tapes, and explored these together with the observation notes and personal documents to inductively find themes and categories. The theme statements were verified with the participants.

Findings

I have reported the findings in three chapters. In order to report the themes clearly, I found it necessary to categorize them differently from the focus of the original questions. Chapter 5 addresses the participants perceptions of writing: what it is, their writing goals, and their feelings about writing as they evolved from non-writers to

writers. In Chapter 6, I report their concepts of themselves as writers, also as they changed during the time of the study. The themes which emerged fell into the categories of self-esteem, the influence of others and of previous school experience, and perceived writing identity. My observations of their writing behavior also appear in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents the factors the participants considered significant in the process of learning to write. Internal factors included attitudes to learning and processes used to write, while external factors involved other people and tools.

For a list of the individual thematic responses as they occurred in relation to study questions 1 and 2, see Appendices B and C.

Conclusions

I reached five main conclusions from the findings of this study.

A. Adult literacy learners have definite views about writing; they are aware of many of the diverse functions and components of writing.

As I analyzed the data, three categories of writing associations emerged. The participants linked writing with functional tasks, with personal expression, and with specific concrete skills. They spoke of functional tasks such as filling out forms, preparing resumes, taking notes, ordering items, and writing cheques and business letters.

Writing was also a way to express feelings and describe experiences, and to relate to other people through shared stories or personal letters. In addition, writing meant spelling, copying the words of others, and applying these skills within the time limits required by a situation.

In other words, the adult learners have a broader awareness of the nature of writing than was indicated by Fagan (1988a), Forester (1988) and Osmond (1986).

B. Adult literacy learners have diverse motivations for writing, and their writing purposes tend to change from concrete, functional goals to personal, expressive ones as they experience the act of writing.

Before the program the participants' statements about writing goals emphasized functional tasks. They wanted to write in order to apply for jobs, to be eligible for better jobs, to handle work tasks that required writing, and to perform everyday chores such as writing cheques and business letters. They also had broader educational goals which required an ability to write. Personal goals took precedence as the learners began to write. The participants wanted to write to express their feelings, to share their experiences with others, to help others with similar problems, to achieve self-esteem, and to maintain relationships through personal letters.

The experience of meeting the personal goals seemed to be more energizing and influential on improved feelings of self-worth than the achievement of functional goals.

C. Adult literacy learners' attitudes toward both writing and themselves as writers change from negative to relatively positive as they learn to write using a language experience/process writing approach.

At the beginning of the study, the feelings that were expressed in relation to writing were frustration, shame, embarrassment, and apprehension. The participants described themselves as people with low self-esteem because of previous school failures and the negative attitudes of other people. In turn, the low self-esteem caused them to talk about themselves as dependent, isolated non-writers.

By the end of the study their attitudes had changed markedly. They talked of writing as enjoyable and they wrote with enthusiasm. Holding a previous belief in the transformational power of writing, they began to experience transformation of their self-concepts and to take action in their lives. Their appraisals of their writing progress was specific and realistic, but they did come to consider themselves writers and they saw that their stories had an impact on other people.

D. A combination of external and internal factors need to be present for adult literacy learners to learn to write.

The external factors which emerged as contributory to learning to write included support of family members or co-workers, a home or work situation which provided the time, impetus and/or opportunity to attend a program, and help with the learning from non-judgmental teachers, tutors, and/or classmates. Aids such as computers and dictionaries were also instrumental, as was the awareness of an audience for the writing.

Psychologically, the participants expressed strong self-motivation, some degree of belief in their ability to learn which included separating their learning difficulties from their sense of self, and a willingness to persevere and to risk making mistakes. The capacity to become self-directing as learners and to select techniques which suited their learning styles was evidenced in their behaviour. The more they understood of the processes involved, the more confident they seemed to be of their ability to master those processes.

E. Writing changes the lives of adult literacy learners.

Personal empowerment occurred as the participants' self-esteem and confidence increased, and as their view of themselves as people who could not write was transformed into a perception that they were writers. As their writing influenced others, they began to acknowledge that they could affect others' lives in positive ways. They received

admiration and praise from others for the first time in their lives and they stopped hiding.

They also achieved a level of functional empowerment or adaptation as they acquired writing skills. They could now apply for jobs, perform work tasks, and write for everyday purposes. They wanted to be able to write much more, and do it with greater ease and speed, but they could now function in situations that had been out of reach a few weeks earlier.

Social, if not political, empowerment took place as they began to make changes in their own worlds and to act for the first time as people with rights: to request information, to live where they chose, to carry on with their educations, and to complain about injustice. When they were able to help fellow students with writing problems, or when they inspired someone else through a story, they also effected change in the lives of others.

Implications and Recommendations

Four general implications arise out of the conclusions of the study. The first is theoretical and procedural, the next two are procedural, and the fourth offers suggestions for further research.

1. The multi-faceted nature of writing should be taken into account in adult literacy programs, and learners' goals should be negotiated accordingly.

Those who work in the adult literacy field and literacy learners themselves acknowledge that writing has many purposes and many component skills. Learners' goals can be as diverse as writing itself. Literacy programs, therefore, should offer opportunities for learners to experience and develop competency in as many of the writing areas as possible. Therefore:

a) Although learners come to programs expressing their needs in terms of technical goals, in actual fact they may be disappointed if we take these appeals at face value.

The participants in this study began to develop as writers when we negotiated additional goals and when they began to experience expressive writing. Not until they felt the self-confidence provided by the personal writing did they perform functional writing tasks, even though they sometimes had been capable of performing the latter. Osmond (1986) had the same experience with her student, that only when he felt sufficiently confident would he actually exercise his functional literacy skills. She reports a similar finding in England:

> Jones and Charnley, in their study of the outcomes of the British literacy campaign, found that mastery of the skills was not, in the final outcome, what the students themselves valued most. Most felt that the real gain had been in confidence in themselves. The researchers suggested that 'the mark of a successful

> student was a gain in confidence, without which progress in the skills would not take place. In addition, they found that many of the students who had learned to master functional literacy tasks were simply not willing to exercise these skills in a real context. (in Osmond, pp. 36-37)

b) Although a learner's expressed needs are a valuable starting point, we need to go farther. In Osmond's words:

> The ultimate aim should be to help him fashion new goals which will lead him to real, reflective reading and real, reflective writing. In short, our ultimate aim should be to help Tony become a literate person with a sense of control over his life and his language. (p. 37)

Fagan (1988a) concurs with this point of view: "The program may need to initially entertain these concepts (learners' perceptions) and then seek to broaden and expand them so that the focus is on literacy behaviours rather than literacy skills" (p. 59).

c) The teacher has a vital role to play in this process.

The studies that indicate that learners' notions of writing are restricted do not describe the context--the programs or the teacher attitudes which influenced the learners' notions. In my study, the participants were able to move beyond their preconceptions almost immediately because they were willing to believe what the teacher said

so long as experience which validated the new notions followed immediately. As Fagan (1988a) recommends:

> Since teachers and tutors affect how learners perceive reading and writing, they need to examine their notions of what it means to be literate. Reading and writing should be seen as meaning constructing activities which may be used for various purposes. It is not enough for teachers/tutors to believe this; they must also operationalize their beliefs. (p. 58)

2. Writing programs for adult literacy learners should provide a safe and supportive environment which encourages self-confidence, self-directedness and risk-taking.

The sense of safety, of being part of a collaborating family of fellow students and teacher, was an important factor to the participants' learning. The provision of a safe audience for the stories was a vital part of this. Therefore:

a) While one-to-one tutoring programs can provide this sense of security, so can group settings, though probably not the traditional classroom.

As an outcome of their study of women's cognitive development, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) recommend the "midwife model" of teaching for learners who feel self-doubt, advocating teachers who "trust their students' thinking and encourage them to expand it" (p.

227). Kazemek (1988) discusses the implications of their findings for adult literacy programs, advising that we:

> Rethink and restructure from a feminine perspective the way literacy instruction is conducted. Learning circles in which the instructor and students work collaboratively as co-learners and mutual nurturers of caring build on the strengths of adults, both female and male, empower adults to act collectively on their world. (p. 24)

b) Forester (1988) has concrete advice for the adult literacy teacher to help make learning safe and to encourage risk-taking:

> You may need to find . . . metaphors for your students to ease them away from the convictions that only correct spelling and writing are worthwhile . . . to have them acknowledge that trial-and-error learning produced excellent results and that mistakes often became the best teachers . . . . Adults who seek literacy training usually have a long history of failures and need special reassurance. Begin by striking the word 'no' from your vocabulary; then throw away your red pen. Count the number of correct words . . . comment on the fact that you can understand the message . . . comment on increasing volume . . . (and) willingness to try interesting ways of spelling. (pp. 611-612)

The participants in my study, like those in the studies of Forester and Osmond, began to really write when they believed it was acceptable to make mistakes and to use alternate spellings.

c) A developing sense of autonomy, of self-directedness, is important in the process of learning to write because it encourages control of the language. This involves another level of risk-taking.

According to Rigg and Kazemek (1983), "the best environments encourage adults to raise their own cognitive questions, to take risks, and to learn from those risks. Teacher and learners work together to determine what the learner wants and needs to know" (p. 28).

The teacher/tutor must therefore relinquish the role of expert, and instead involve the learners in planning their own programs. As Norman and Malicky (1986) recommend for upper-level learners:

> A major emphasis needs to be on the adult planning and directing his or her own program. The instructor still provides assistance when asked, but does not go into the learning context with a preplanned curriculum. The decisions and power linked with these decisions are passed over to the adults as part of the assimilation into the culture of literacy. Unless this occurs, the adult may make some progress into learning to read and

write but the chances of him/her becoming truly literate are remote. (p. 15)

3. A metacognitive approach should be included in adult literacy writing programs.

The participants began to write and to change more quickly than has been reported as the case in other literacy studies. One contributing factor may have been the metacognitive elements of the literacy program. The writing process was explained before they began to write, together with the reasons for using this approach. The steps remained visible on the wall. At each stage, conferences were held in which I would explain a particular writing convention and the learners would immediately practise it with my assistance. In most cases the basics of the convention then seemed to be internalized and applied to new writing. The explanations involved not just a description of a technique or a rule, but also included information that Crain (1988) defines as metacognitive. She says that for a learning technique to become a strategy, the learner must know when, where, how and why to use it (p. 683).

Fagan's 1989 study of writing behaviours of low-literate adults, grade 9 and grade 6 students, also implies that metacognition is helpful to assist developing writers. He describes the profile of "the achieving grade nine students" and recommends emulating this profile (p. 15). He adds, "A second implication follows from the writings of

Graves. He maintains that progress is made when writers become aware of the process. Through modelling and discussion, writers should be made aware of the decisions they make as they write" (p. 15).

In Mountainbird's (1989) study with ESL students, everyone involved recommended metacognitive awareness in helping learners develop as writers:

> Student-participants reported benefits of the metacognitive approach: clarification, opportunity for verbal expression, time for thinking and understanding, awareness of progress through comparison of work . . . The researcher also reported benefits of the metacognitive approach: a harmony of student-centered methods and goals, data for researchers and curriculum developers, 'encouraging' and 'enabling' of participants, and growth of self-awareness and autonomy of participants. (p. 3595A)

4. More research, using different designs and contexts, is necessary before we can make generalizations about how adults learn to write.

The results of this study are profoundly context-specific, and even within this one context there is diversity among the participants' attitudes and strategies. Various interrelationships still need to be explored, for example between the nature of writing programs and the development of adult writing strategies; among writing

programs, concepts of writing and learning to write, and the development of adult writing strategies; and between contextual aspects of literacy programs and the effects of learning to write. Therefore:

a) We need more research into writing processes and approaches to writing.

Nolan (1988) gives two reasons:

> Studies . . . indicate that we have barely begun to scratch the surface in our attempts to understand what the writer <u>does</u>. Furthermore, the writing process is intensely personal. It varies from person to person and even from one writing act to another. (p. 198)

Willinsky (1987) concurs that further research is desirable:

> It will take a number of different designs and repeated measures to ascertain with any degree of certainty the impact on students of these different introductions into literacy . . . both approaches, the skill-sequenced and the expressive-writing, continue to deserve careful scrutiny and more sophisticated techniques in assessing what students are learning about writing and about themselves as they are taken down these different roads to literacy. (p. 121)

b) There is also concern about the lack of research into approaches to literacy education. The participants in my study found the role of classmates important in providing a supportive atmosphere for learning, but "no one has yet

engaged in ethnographic or case studies which compare specific approaches to literacy education (collaborative learning circles and one-to-one models) and their effectiveness." (Kazemek, 1988, p. 15).

c) Another reason for further research is the suspect nature of current adult literacy data.

Diekhoff (1988), in his examination of adult literacy program data and its distortions, questions the validity of student and teacher self-reports. He states that after putting so much time and effort into literacy learning, neither students nor tutors are likely to call their efforts a failure. "Reduction of dissonance is a fundamental factor in shaping (and distorting) perceptions, including those of literacy students and tutors. Self-report data from students and tutors must therefore be considered suspect" (p. 628). Self-reports, I believe, have context-bound validity, but certainly other measures and longitudinal studies would contribute to a clearer and more comprehensive picture.

d) Finally, although other anecdotal reports and the results of this study attest to the empowering effects of learning to write using a language experience approach, we do not know how the gap between disempowerment and empowerment is really bridged.

As Darville (1989) explains in the section "Telling Stories and Telling More":

> The splitting off of the language of experience from the literacy of power is present at the very heart of literacy teaching and learning . . . We who do literacy work need to learn to observe, conceptualize, and even research these forms of literacy and the gap between them, in our ordinary work. To do so, we need to take seriously Weinstein's observation that practices of literacy are tied up with specific uses and users of literacy, and their locations in society. (p. 35)

Postscript

February 25, 1990. A few minutes ago I wrote the last words of my story about four people who got their stories out and courageously exposed their lives to our scrutiny so that others like them could benefit from better literacy programs.

When I summarized the scope of the problem in Canada at the end of 1989, I noted a number of hopeful trends in public awareness and commitment to adult literacy. The writing on the wall is not so hopeful today. Earlier this afternoon a neighbour passed on the rumour that proposed college-based community outreach literacy programs in British Columbia will not proceed because of this week's Canadian federal budget cuts in transfer payments to provinces.

This morning I listened to an item on CBC Radio's "Sunday Morning" about the incipient demise, because of

withdrawal of funding, of a Nova Scotia literacy program that had recently been awarded public honours for its excellent work. The award was part of activities to celebrate the International Year of Literacy. The program was given five weeks' termination notice.

One of the Nova Scotia literacy learners interviewed voiced the opinion that they were being deliberately silenced because as they learned to think, "we would change our vote." The removal of proffered hope was seen as more cruel than never offering hope in the first place.

Before we look to implement any of the recommendations of this study, we need to work first for a legitimate place and secure funding for literacy education. We failed Roger and Edith and Ann and Dorothy the first time around, and it would be tragic to silence the voices they have finally found. Their stories are out; I hope they will not be writ on water.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Before Writing

1. What was it like/did it feel like not being able to write?
2. What things could/couldn't you write?
3. How did you get by?
4. What did you want to write/what would you have used writing for/what kinds of writing did you want to be able to do?
5. What were your early experiences in learning to write?
6. Why do you want to learn to write?

Learning to Write

1. What did you write in the class? Why?
2. What did you find most helpful in learning to write?
3. What did you find least helpful/most frustrating while learning to write?
4. What felt best about learning to write? Worst?

After Writing

1. What writing are you able to do now that you couldn't do before?
2. What writing are you actually doing now?
3. How do you feel about writing now that you have written?
4. Do you notice any changes in other people's attitudes toward you now that they have seen your writing?
5. Do you feel you have met the goals you had when you started the course?

APPENDIX B

THEMATIC RESPONSES TO QUESTION 1:

How did your inability to write affect your life?

Dorothy

1. I wanted to write letters, job applications and cheques but I couldn't. I got really frustrated.
2. My daughter used to help me.
3. I thought everyone would look down on me because I couldn't write.
4. I felt very isolated because I avoided activities where I might have to write.
5. My Mom used to beat me if I couldn't spell a word.
6. I was put in a special class at school.
7. I could get better jobs if I could write; it hurts to always get the dumpy jobs.
8. My life would have been different if I could write.
9. I want to be independent.
10. I want to learn to spell.
11. I can't do work tasks which require writing.
12. I can't write fast enough.
13. I'm afraid of failing.

Roger

1. I want to take the Armed Forces entry exam.
2. I felt frustrated when I couldn't write.
3. I had no self-confidence.
4. I couldn't apply for jobs.
5. I used people I know to get jobs and do writing tasks.

6. I wanted to make out orders at work.

7. I wanted to finish school.

8. If I could have written, my life would have been changed.

9. I was open about my dyslexia.

10. In school I was ignored, told I was stupid, and put in special classes.

11. I didn't write letters.

12. I couldn't help my nephews with their homework.

13. Eventually you run out of lies.

14. I was scared to start writing.

15. I couldn't write fast enough.

Edith

1. I felt I was left out of everything. I felt awful.

2. I haven't written anything; I could never write anything down.

3. My daughter helped me with writing.

4. I didn't want people to read my letters. I didn't send them.

5. I wanted to write songs, recipes, letters and cheques.

6. I used the excuse that I forgot my glasses.

7. I wanted to write my life story, but I couldn't.

8. I don't like to write down words that I can't spell.

9. I haven't told my daughter that I'm taking this course.

10. I used to wonder if I could learn to read and write.

Ann

1. My family criticized my letters, so I stopped writing.

2. I wanted to write my feelings on paper, but I couldn't. Things would have been different if I could have.

3. Upgrading gave me self-confidence.

4. I couldn't perform writing tasks at work.

5. I hid my illiteracy from everyone but my immediate family.

6. I couldn't apply for jobs because I couldn't fill out the application forms.

7. Alcoholics Anonymous and my son have given me support.

8. I want to take my aerobics' intructor's course.

9. My parents were told I couldn't learn in a school setting.

APPENDIX C

THEMATIC RESPONSES TO QUESTION 2:

What impact has learning to write had on your life?

Dorothy

1. I want to write my life story to help other women.
2. My colleagues respect me more.
3. I am writing letters now.
4. I hate to see my earlier writing because I can see all the mistakes in it.
5. I write regularly in a journal.
6. I can do paragraphs now.
7. I still can't write all cheque amounts, and I can't write fast enough for public situations.
8. I can perform writing tasks at work now.
9. I feel good about myself now.
10. I really want my education, now I know that I can do it.

Roger

1. I've got a lot of feelings inside I want to get out.
2. It feels great to get my feelings on paper.
3. I feel more confident now.
4. I can do and am doing things at work I couldn't do before.
5. My co-workers seem to respect me more.
6. Writing is fun.
7. I want to write more stories of my experiences.
8. I need less help now with writing tasks.

9. Spelling will never be my strong suit.

Edith

1. I write some cheques now. I have copied out recipes, songs and poems.
2. I'm getting better at spelling.
3. I know a lot of words now that I didn't know before.
4. I would like to get my story out; I want family and friends to read my story.
5. I haven't told anyone I'm writing this story.
6. Telling my story upsets me, I relive it.
7. I enjoy writing, especially when I get the words right.
8. Telling my story seems important to me.
9. Now I know if I put my mind to it I can do it.

Ann

1. Writing slows my head down and helps me straighten my thoughts out.
2. I felt special when my story helped someone else.
3. I have filled out lots of job application forms and done a resume.
4. I am writing personal letters again.
5. I enjoy writing. Writing is important.
6. I am doing this for me.
7. I want to go on with my schooling.